10 3 m

EUSEBES to PHILETUS:

A SERIES OF LETTERS FROM A FATHER TO A SON, ON A DEVOUT TEMPER AND LIFE.

1286

By STEPHEN ADDINGTON.

K

Exercise thyself unto Godliness.

LONDON:

Printed for the AUTHOR; and Sold by J. BUCKLAND, at the Buck in Paternoster-Row.
MDCCLXVII.

20

EUSEBES to PHILETUS.

A

SERIES OF LETTERS

FROM

A FATHER TO A SON,

ON A

DEVOUT IMPROVABLE LIFE.

By STEPHEN ADDINGTON.

Horæ subsecivæ sine Deo.

LONDON:

Printed for the Author, and Sold by J. Buckland, at the Buck in Paternoster-Row.

MDCCLXXI.

PREFACE.

PHILETUS, the ſon of EUSEBES, has lately entered upon buſineſs, and is at the head of a family. He was religiouſly educated, and diſcovers nothing of an immoral turn. He is well acquainted with his Bible, expreſſes a regard for the principles and inſtitutions of the Goſpel, and there appears in him ſome good thing towards the Lord his GOD. But he is naturally timid and irreſolute, and his ſituation expoſes him to many ſnares. His father feels for

him with the affection of a parent and a christian; and wishes him that experimental and practical acquaintance with the Divine Life which would form him for usefulness here, and a station of distinguished honour and happiness in a better world.

THE

THE CONTENTS.

LETTER I.

ON the Perfections of God, Page 1

LETTER II.

On the true ſpirit of Piety and Devotion, 9

LETTER III.

The ſame Subject continued, 21

LETTER IV.

On the religious obſervation of the Sabbath, 36

LET-

Page

LETTER V.

On the publick Ordinances of Religion, 50

LETTER VI.

On a due Attendance upon Publick Worſhip 59

LETTER VII.

On the Unprofitableneſs of Publick Ordinances, 70

LETTER VIII.

On Private Devotion, 80

LETTER IX.

The ſame Subject continued, 93

LETTER X.

On attending upon the Lord's Supper, 100

LET-

Page

LETTER XI.

The ſame Subject continued, 115

LETTER XII.

The ſame Subject continued, 133

LETTER XIII.

On the Duties of Communicants, 158

LETTER XIV.

On Baptiſm, 164

LETTER XV.

On Family Religion, 177

LETTER XVI.

On Faſting and Humiliation, 198

LET-

Page

LETTER XVII.

On the reasonableness and expediency of a devout Temper and Life in general, 212

EUSEBES to PHILETUS.

LETTER I.

On the Perfections of GOD.

MY Son, if thine heart be wiſe, my heart ſhall rejoice, even mine.—It will give me pleaſure to ſee you diſpoſed for every intellectual and manly improvement; cultivating an acquaintance with thoſe ſeveral branches of uſeful knowledge, into the firſt principles of which you was early initiated; and conducting yourſelf, in every ſta-

tion and circumſtance, in a manner that may do you honour, and render you an extenſive bleſſing.—But above all, my heart's deſire and prayer to GOD for you is, that you may be wiſe to know him, and love him, and ſerve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind.—This has been frequently recommended to you, both in publick, and in private; and the word of GOD ſays much to aſſiſt you in his ſervice and diſpoſe you for it. From a child you have been acquainted with the contents of that ſacred volume. You was taught to read your Bible almoſt as ſoon as you could read at all: Its important truths have been explained to you, and its glorious deſign has been urged upon you; ſome of the leading evidences of its divine original have likewiſe, at one time or other, been laid before you; and I truſt you have the ſatisfaction to know that, in your adherence to the great principles of Chriſtianity, you have not been "following cunningly deviſed fables." As I would wiſh you might feel that

ſatis-

ſatisfaction yet more powerfully and constantly, let me intreat you to go on to search the scriptures. Dig deep and laboriously (as the miner does, into the bowels of the earth) for hid treasures. The treasures of divine knowledge are there; and such as will make you an ample amends for all the time and pains you may employ on the inquiry. In the word, as in every work, of the Almighty, you will find this noble advantage of all the productions of art, that the more minutely you examine it, the more you will discern of its intrinsic beauty and excellence; and the better disposed you will be to receive and esteem it as the truth of God:——Therein you have the words of eternal life: not only the discoveries of a future world, but those instructions likewise, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. This sacred volume will give you the best assistance in your inquiries after God, and your duty to him.—You have always believed his

exiſtence; realize it ſeriouſly and frequently; and the ſeveral repreſentations which he has therein given of his nature and perfections.

That divine revelation teaches you to conceive of him as a Spirit; an intelligent, ſelf-conſcious being, as the ſpirit and life of the creation; himſelf uncreated, and infinitely above all dependance upon another for his continued exiſtence and happineſs. Look back to the beginning of time, and, if I may ſo ſpeak, to thouſands, and ten thouſand times ten thouſand, of ages before ever the mountains were brought forth, or he had created the earth and world: from everlaſting he is GOD. Extend your thoughts to all beings and to all worlds; and know that there is not a point of ſpace in the univerſe but GOD is there: he fills heaven and earth with his preſence. And as he is every where, it is eaſy to conceive that he muſt know all things. He ſees the conduct of his creatures at all times, and in all circumſtances; yea he ſearches the reins, and the heart.

All

All things are naked (or without external covering) and open (having no concealment within that is impenetrable) to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. He is perfectly acquainted with the nature and conſequences of thoſe general laws which he has eſtabliſhed in his creation; and he likewiſe foreſees every event that will take place in every future period of time, in all parts of the univerſe. This knowledge is indeed too wonderful for us; but it is no more than the oracles of truth expreſsly aſſert of their divine author; no more than they prove him poſſeſſed of by a variety of inſtances. They aſſure us likewiſe that he upholds and directs all things: that he can fulfill all his pleaſure; that he always purſues the beſt ends, by the beſt means; and will, in every diſpoſal of his providence do right. Juſtice and judgment are the foundations of his throne. All the hoſts of Heaven adore him as the holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. We might conclude from hence

that he is ever diſpleaſed with the unholy and profane. But we are expreſsly told, that the wicked his ſoul hateth; that he is angry with ſuch every day; and the righteous Judge of the Univerſe has often, and in very awful terms, threatened them with the juſt puniſhment of their crimes either here or hereafter. Yet is the Lord GOD merciful and gracious, ſlow to anger, forgiving iniquity and plenteous in redemption. Daily obſervation and experience may convince us that he is good to all, and that his tender mercies are over all works. But know, my Philetus, that he will ſhew ſpecial favour to the righteous: His eyes are continually over them for good; his ears are open to their prayers; his word aſſures us that he will give grace and glory, and will withold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. And has he not abundantly confirmed his word in the conduct of his providence towards his creatures in all generations?—— The creation itſelf, and the eſtabliſhed laws by which it appears to be governed,

ed, the ſeveral inhabitants of the earth, the air and the ſeas, every object of our ſenſes, and every ſubject of our rational thought and inquiry, is a teſtimony and memorial of this GOD, and of theſe perfections of his nature.

"Where ſenſe can reach, or fancy
"rove,
"From hill to hill, from field to
"grove;
"Acroſs the waves, around the ſky;
"There's not a ſpot, or deep or high,
"Where the Creator has not trod,
"And left the footſteps of a GOD."

And know that his name alone is Jehovah, and that his glory will he not give to another. There are none on earth or in heaven worthy of being compared to him; none that can reaſonably be deſired beſides him.—Indeed there are none but owe all the excellence and happineſs of which they are poſſeſſed, to this great being: he is the father of the univerſe; and his nature and perfections will continue

tinue the ſame when theſe heavens, and this earth are no more. They ſhall periſh (ſays one of his ſervants, in a devout addreſs to him) but thou ſhalt endure; yea all of them ſhall wax old like a garment; as a veſture ſhalt thou change them and they ſhall be changed; but thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall have no end. Hence GOD is juſtly repreſented as the dwelling-place of his people in all generations. And, having revealed himſelf to us in the New-Teſtament as the GOD and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, he has encouraged us, in his name, to come boldly to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. Before that throne you have frequently bowed the knee, both in publick and in private. May you continue to make your approaches to it with the devotion which his word inculcates, and with all the ſucceſs which it encourages you then to expect! Adieu!

I am, &c.

LET-

LETTER II.

On the true ſpirit of Piety and Devotion.

IT will give me pleaſure, my Philetus, if I can ſay any thing to aſſiſt you in your inquiries after God, and your duty to him.—You have often, you ſay, entered into his preſence to engage in, what are called, acts of devotion, without conſidering wherein true devotion conſiſts; and indeed without any concern to cheriſh, and expreſs a diſpoſition of heart ſuitable to thoſe perfections of the bleſſed God, of which you have been reminded. The queſtion you propoſe is a very important one, "Wherewith ſhall I come "before the Lord and how ſhall I "bow before the moſt high God." You cannot but be ſenſible that, in order

order to perform a ſervice acceptable to an omniſcient being, you muſt be ſincere in it. Ever dread and deteſt the thought of puting on the appearances of ſanctity and devotion, to be ſeen of men. The GOD with whom you have to do cannot be deceived, nor will he be mocked. He ſeeth not as man ſeeth: man looketh at the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. He once ſpake with awful indignation of a people whoſe hearts were far from him, while they drew near to him with their mouths, and honoured him with their lips. Nor was our Jeſus ever ſeverer with any character than with that of the hypocrite. Indeed it is a very deteſtable one, and deſerves not only cenſure, but contempt. Ever avoid the moſt diſtant approaches towards it, and cultivate in the heart thoſe ſentiments and affections which you either expreſs, or ought to feel, before GOD; knowing that thoſe who would approve themſelves his true worſhipers, muſt worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.

truth.—You aſk, "What are thoſe "ſentiments and affections towards "God which conſtitute the true ſpirit "of devotion, and which ought, as "ſuch, to be cheriſhed in his ſacred "preſence?" Need I tell you, my Philetus, that it becomes us as creatures, and eſpecially as ſinners, to approach him with reverence and godly fear? You know it; and will, I hope, always remember, that it is a very ſolemn work to converſe with God. A bold irreverent behaviour, or even a trifling ſpirit, would be highly provoking to the Almighty. "Serve the "Lord with fear," is a precept to Kings, and a precept which Seraphs do well to obey. Recollect what you know of the perfections of God, and the ſeveral relations in which he ſtands to his creatures; think of the expreſſions of holy awe and veneration with which he is approached by the inhabitants of the upper world; and you will, I hope, at all times, but eſpecially when you are preſenting yourſelf before him, be diſpoſed to ſanctify the

Lord

Lord GOD in your heart, and to make him your fear and your dread. Remember Nadab and Abihu; as alſo the two ſons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas; whoſe irreverence before GOD, with the awful conſequences of it, are recorded in the ſacred hiſtory* for our warning. And when you recollect their character and their end, learn ever to bow before the throne with that contrition, and humility of mind, which ſuitable apprehenſions of GOD and ourſelves will always promote. There confeſs, my Philetus, in the language of true penitence, your tranſgreſſions, unto the Lord: the ſins of your heart, as well as thoſe of your words and actions—Such as have been committed more immediately againſt GOD, and every treſpaſs againſt your fellow creatures—the ſins of childhood and youth, together with thoſe of your riper years—nay the repeated inſtances in which you have neglected your duty, or have engaged in it in an unbecoming and unprofitable manner, and

* See 1 Sam. ii. and iii.

and every ſecret or heedleſs ſin, as well as your open and wilful violations of the law of God. Own with ſhame and ſorrow the iniquity of your ſins as committed againſt the majeſty of heaven, and the God of love; as violations of a law, in itſelf juſt and good; and the obligations of which have been clearly revealed to you, and powerfully inculcated upon you. Lament before him the ingratitude with which you have been chargeable towards the author of your being, and the father of all your mercies; the unworthy returns you have made him for the protection and bounty of his providence, and more eſpecially for the riches of his grace in Chriſt Jeſus; the ſad inſtances in which you have acted contrary to the inſtructions you have received, the conviction of your own conſcience, your religious purpoſes, and moſt ſolemn engagements. Lament, when before the throne, what you yet feel of an evil heart of unbelief that is prone to depart from the living God; the ſtrength of your evil

appetites and paſſions; the eaſy acceſs that temptations find to the heart; the imperfection of the chriſtian graces in your mind, and the unprofitableneſs of your life. Theſe things ſhould be often lamented before GOD; and I hope you will not only confeſs your ſins, but, as becomes a true penitent, immediately and reſolutely forſake them. Seek the aſſiſtance of GOD's holy Spirit for that important purpoſe, while you aſk forgiveneſs in the temper and language of the publican, "GOD be merciful to me a ſinner." That petition expreſſes not only a becoming lowlineſs of ſpirit, but likewiſe, what I would alſo recommend to you in your ſeaſons of devout intercourſe with heaven, viz. an ardent deſire after GOD, and the bleſſings of his favour. Acts of devotion, you will remember, are not expedient, merely or chiefly upon their own account; they are to be engaged in as a means to a farther end: An end no leſs important than that of our acceptance with GOD through Chriſt Jeſus. And ſurely this is of conſe-

quence

quence enough to make us in good earneſt. His favour is life, his loving kindneſs is better than life. Well may you ſay unto the Lord, with holy Aſaph, "Whom have I in heaven "but thee? there is none upon earth "that I deſire beſides thee. In one "GOD I have all things —— every "thing that I need or can deſire to "make me compleatly happy." Go thus my Philetus, and pour out your heart from day to day, in fervent petitions for the mercy of GOD unto eternal life, and an intereſt in all the bleſſings of his love and covenant through Jeſus the mediator. This Paul recommends to his chriſtian brethren when he exhorts them to be fervent in ſpirit ſerving the Lord, and to continue inſtant* (ſtriving with all their attention and might) in prayer. With ſuch holy ardour he elſewhere intreats them to ſtrive together with him† (as the Champions of Greece did in their conteſts till they were in an agony) in

* προσκαρτερεῦντες Rom. xii. 12.
† συναγωνισασθαι Ch. xv. 30.

prayer to GOD. And let me intreat you, when proſtrating the ſoul before the great father of mercies, to plead thus with him as for your life, the life of your ſoul. " Gracious GOD! ſay " unto my ſoul I am thy ſalvation. " There be many that ſay, who will " ſhew us any good? Lord, lift thou " up the light of thy countenance " upon me, then ſhall I ſay, with " great joy and thankfulneſs, thou haſt " put gladneſs into my heart, more " than in the time that their corn and " their wine increaſed. For thee, I " hope, I could give up every expec- " tation and reſign every enjoyment " upon earth; and count all things " but loſs and dung if ſo be that I " may obtain an intereſt in GOD, and " be found at laſt in Chriſt Fa- " ther of mercies, number me among " thy children. Let my name be " written in the Lamb's book of life; " and grant me the ſpirit of adoption " to witneſs with my ſpirit that I am " an heir of GOD, and a joint heir " with Chriſt Jeſus.

" I

" I would diſmiſs my carnal hope,
" My fond deſires recall;
" I'll give my mortal intereſts up,
" And make my GOD my all."

Thus ſhould the boſom glow with fervent deſires after GOD in all our applications to the throne of grace—And the truely devout worſhipper, will delight much in his ſacred preſence and in all the exerciſes of communion with him. A ſpirit of devotion, my dear Philetus, will teach you to eſteem it your heaven to be where GOD is. Inſtead of ſaying of his worſhip, as a people profeſſedly his own once did, " What a wearineſs is it!" you will long for ſeaſons of holy intercourſe with the moſt high. When at a diſtance from him, the language of your heart will be " Oh when ſhall I go and appear before GOD?" And when you are in his preſence, you will take pains to keep the heart for GOD, to get near him, even to his ſeat, and to keep out every intruder

that would divert the beſt affections of the ſoul from their worthy object, or abate the moſt lively exerciſe of them there. This principle will teach you to value every thing, every employment, every holy inſtitution and ordinance that leads you to GOD. His houſe will appear lovely to you, as the place where his honour dwells. His Word, as it reminds you of him, and gives you many valuable inſtructions concerning him, when read over or heard with attention, and accompanied with the heart-enlightening and reviving energy of its divine author, will be more precious in your eſteem than thouſands of gold and ſilver. You will rejoice to be at his Table, becauſe he himſelf is uſed to be at the feaſt. Your praying and hearing ſeaſons will be delightful, as the means of opening and keeping up a communication between GOD and your ſoul, and you will be thankful for every friend and for every event in the courſe of providence, that directs you to GOD, and teaches you to maintain

an

an intimate and ſteady intercourſe with him. Every contemplation on his perfections, works, and word; and every tranſaction in which you can ſay of a truth, your communion has been with the Father and with his Son Jeſus Chriſt, will afford you a joy which no earthly good can equal; a joy unſpeakable and full of glory. "My "ſoul (ſays a devout writer) delights "itſelf in GOD. Thus far I can ſpeak; "but all the reſt is unutterable, and "I muſt leave the pleaſing tale till I "can talk in the language of immor-"tality." And Oh when ſhall I get rid of the incumbrances and tempters of earth, I long to be at a diſtance from every thing that alienates the beſt affections of my ſoul from GOD. Here I lament the ſad influence of worldly cares and buſineſs; worldly pleaſures and pains in this reſpect. My neareſt friends and deareſt delights upon earth often come, like a dark cloud, between GOD and my ſoul, and hide his face from me. But in his preſence is fulneſs of joy. Oh for the wings of a dove!

dove! then would I flee away and be at reſt. Oh my gracious GOD! my once incarnate but now glorified Redeemer! My ſoul longs to ſee thee in the light of glory! When ſhall I join the holy happy ſpirits which are before the throne, and in the exalted accents of angels and of juſt men made perfect, aſcribe bleſſing and honour and glory and power unto him that ſits upon the throne and to the lamb! Come Lord Jeſus, come quickly! Amen and Amen!

I am, &c,

LET-

LETTER III.

The ſame ſubject continued.

I Beſeech you, my Philetus, by what you have heard of the mercies of God, and by all that you are encouraged to hope for from the forbearance, compaſſion, and good-will which he has manifeſted in Chriſt Jeſus, that you preſent your whole-ſelf, ſoul and body unto him whoſe you are and whom you ought to ſerve. Realize and acknowledge his right to you, and ſhew your belief and approbation of it by conſecrating all you are, and all you have, to him. He will not have blood ſpilt upon his altar in theſe days of the Goſpel, but requires you to preſent yourſelf to him as a living ſacrifice. And let me intreat you to ſee to it that this ſacrifice be holy; free from moral pollution, as the law of God

GOD required that thoſe which were formerly offered to him in his Temple ſhould be, from ceremonial defilement; that ſo it may be acceptable in his ſight. It matters little what others may think of you; ſeek to be approved of GOD in all your tranſactions with him now, as you wiſh to appear before him with honour another day. And perform this as your reaſonable ſervice; as that which may be expected of you as a man and as a chriſtian. Realize the obligations of a religious profeſſion when you are before the throne of GOD, and take care to perform every ſervice from a principle of duty and ſubjection to him. What ever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord; becauſe he has commanded it, and becauſe you eſteem his yoke eaſy and his burden light: act as one who is willing to be all that he would have you to be, and to do all that he would have you to do; accounting it your honour and happineſs to be devoted to him; to exert every power, and improve every talent to the

the glory of his great name; as his creature, as a member of his family and the ſubject of his moral government.

" Had I a thouſand hearts my GOD
" my love,
" Had I a thouſand voices, all were
" thine;
" Where love inflames the heart, the
" tongue muſt move,
" Nor ſhall the ſong be mortal where
" the theme's divine."

With theſe expreſſions of duty and ſubmiſſion to the bleſſed GOD let me exhort you, my Philetus, to join the moſt affectionate thankſgivings for his many mercies. Paul mentions the unthankful in the liſt of the moſt abandoned ſinners. We are naturally diſpleaſed with ingratitude in one creature to another. But they are moſt of all inexcuſable and criminal who are unmindful of their obligations to their gracious GOD—When you are before his throne, recollect and acknowledge the

the great and good things which he has done, and is continually doing for you. Bleſs him for every capacity of ſoul and body—for the uſe of every limb, and the pleaſures of every ſenſe. Bleſs him for the higher entertainments of the underſtanding. Own his goodneſs in every morſel you eat, in the raiment you wear; in every accommodation of life, and in every friend he has raiſed up for you; in all the advantages of your birth, and the privileges of your education. In a word, devoutly praiſe himfor all you have enjoyed from the moment he formed and animated you in the womb, to the preſent hour. "Oh magnify the "Lord with me and let us exalt his "name together; the lines are fallen "to us in pleaſant places, we have a "goodly heritage." You have peculiar reaſon to acknowledge this, as one born in a chriſtian and proteſtant country; a country in which you enjoy the privileges of GOD's houſe, as well as the comforts of your own: in which you can hear and read the important diſco-

diſcoveries of his word which are able to make you wiſe unto ſalvation through faith in Chriſt Jeſus. And if that divine revelation has proved the effectual means of turning you from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto GOD, your boſom muſt ſurely glow with ardent gratitude to the GOD of all grace, for that unſpeakable bleſſing. You will then praiſe him for his Son, and the glad tidings of pardon and life through his name. You will bleſs him for the invaluable gift of his Spirit, by which he has enlightened your underſtanding, convinced you of ſin, and renewed you in the ſpirit of the mind. You will bleſs him for all that he has been doing, by his ordinances and his providences, to preſerve and perfect the divine life; and for that glorious hope to which he has begotten you again by the reſurrection of his Son Jeſus Chriſt. And let me remind you, my Philetus, not only to be thankful on your own account, but alſo to bleſs the father of mercies for all the happineſs he is communi-

cating to all his creatures on earth and in heaven,—for that paternal care, benevolence, and compaſſion which he exerciſes towards all ranks of beings in every part of his Creation.

Nor will you, I hope, fail to cheriſh and expreſs before this GOD a chearful truſt in him for the time to come. Endeavour to maintain ſuch a lively perſuaſion of his wiſdom, faithfulneſs and goodneſs as will engage you to leave every concern in his hands without the leaſt ſuſpicion or anxiety. The better your opinion of a fellow-creature is, the more readily you can truſt him; and I am perſuaded the more you know of GOD the better diſpoſed you will be to put an unreſerved and unlimited confidence in him. They that know his name will put their truſt in him.—And do not you know it? then commit all your deareſt intereſts to his direction and care. Wait on him, and wait for him in the exerciſe of faith and hope. Recollect his promiſes, plead them with him, and rely upon

upon him for the accompliſhment of them. Plead not with an unbelieving heart; "Is he a man that he ſhould "lie, or the ſon of man that he "ſhould repent? why art thou caſt "down O my ſoul, why art thou "diſquieted within me? hope thou in "GOD, for I ſhall yet praiſe him who "is the health of my countenance "and my GOD." Are not his promiſes all yea and amen in Chriſt Jeſus? Through him we are invited to draw nigh to GOD in the full aſſurance of faith; and there is much in the perfections and undertakings of that glorious and gracious mediator to encourage us ſo to do. His intimate union with the Father, and the intereſt he has in him as his beſt beloved; the great and amiable character he ſuſtained upon earth; the work of mercy in which he engaged when he made his ſoul an offering for ſin; the humiliation, and ſufferings to which he ſubmitted in life and at death to reconcile us to GOD; the triumphs of his reſurrection from the dead, and

the kind office in which he appears at the right-hand of GOD; where, as our advocate with the Father, he ever lives to make interceſſion for us—theſe all join to confirm our faith in that declaration of his word, "that whatſoever we aſk the Father in his "name, it ſhall be given us." Under the animating influence of theſe diſcoveries of the goſpel, labour to maintain and expreſs a lively faith in GOD through this his dear Son, in all your ſeaſons of holy intercourſe with him. Without this it were impoſſible to pleaſe GOD; they that would come to him acceptably muſt believe that he is, and that he will ever approve himſelf, the rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him. And having chearfully committed your immortal intereſts into his hands, be not afraid to truſt him with what relates to the body, or to refer your deareſt friends and beſt comforts upon earth to his wiſe and gracious diſpoſal. But you tell me that through the multiplicity and exceſſive weight of your trials,

trials, (of which you may ſay with the Pſalmiſt, "deep calleth unto deep") your ſtrength is impaired, and your ſpirit is almoſt overwhelmed within you; ſo that weariſome days and nights are appointed unto you.—It is not long ſince you came from the bed-ſide of a dear friend in the agonies of death:—it was hard parting; the ſighs, the dying groans, the laſt farewel, are ſtill preſent with you.—Such, my dear Philetus, are very tender and affecting ſcenes. I wonder not that you feel, nor can I wiſh that you ſhould deſpiſe, the chaſtenings of the Lord; but I hope you will not be weary of his correction, nor faint when you are rebuked of him. In ſuch circumſtances prayer will be peculiarly becoming. So the word of God teaches. Is any afflicted? (ſaith James) let him pray. God threatened to withdraw the tokens of his favourable preſence from his ancient people till they acknowledged their offences, and ſought to him for mercy: in their afflictions, ſays he, they will ſeek me early. If one blow

will not bring you to your knees, he can ſtrike another. It would be impious in you to dare him to it, or to ſay that it is impoſſible for him to make your troubles greater than they are. Let nothing ſo peeviſh drop from your lips nor any murmuring ſentiment be indulged in the heart. Rather with becoming humility and ſubmiſſion caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and ſay unto the allwiſe and righteous diſpoſer of all things, "Not my will but thine "be done; only do not condemn me, "but ſhew me wherefore thou con-"tendeſt with me." You well know that affliction cometh not forth of the duſt, neither doth trouble ſpring out of the ground. Your times are in GOD's hand—not in the hand of an enemy, viſible or inviſible, who would triumph in your diſtreſs and ruin—not in the hand of any earthly friend who might miſtake your true intereſt or be unable to promote it—nor in your own hand, who, were you always left to chooſe for yourſelf, would in many inſtances chooſe amiſs; but at his direction

rection and diſpoſal who is poſſeſſed of every divine perfection to claim your veneration and homage, and to encourage your chearful confidence — Enter and enlarge upon theſe thoughts before GOD, to bow the ſoul to the moſt conſtant and entire ſubmiſſion.— "It is the Lord let him do as ſeem-"eth good in his ſight. He can and "will fulfil all his pleaſure. The in-"habitants of Heaven, Earth and "Hell are in conſtant and abſolute "ſubjection to him: who hath ever "hardened himſelf againſt GOD and "proſpered? As for me, I am cruſh-"ed before the moth.—It was but as "yeſterday that I was not, that GOD "called me into being. He formed "this body of mine, and breathed "into my noſtrils the breath of life. "Every capacity of my intelligent and "immortal ſoul is from him, and "from him I received all my enjoy-"ments. In his hand my breath is, "and his are all my ways, and all my "mercies. He who gave, and con-"tinues to me what I poſſeſs, hath a

"right

" right to recall it when and how he
" pleaſes. Wo unto him that ſtriv-
" eth with his maker! Let me ra-
" ther ſay of every loſt comfort and
" friend,—The Lord gave, and the
" Lord hath taken away, bleſſed be
" the name of the Lord. If I conſi-
" der him as the Lord of all, I muſt
" ſay with his ſervant—ſhall not the
" judge of all the earth do right?
" And through his great mercy I have
" encouragement to hope that the rod
" is in the hand of a Father. I truſt
" he has admitted me to ſome of the
" peculiar privileges of his covenant—
" has begotten me again to the live-
" ly hope of an inheritance incorrup-
" tible and undefiled, that fadeth not
" away; and has formed my ſoul to
" ſomewhat of the temper of his chil-
" dren. This I have profeſſed often,
" both before GOD and his people.
" And ſhall the ſame tongue that has
" repeatedly ſaid unto him, Do with
" me as ſeemeth good in thy ſight,
" now complain of him, or diſpute
" his authority? Has he honoured me
" with

" with a name and a place in his fa-
" mily, has he given me the ſpirit of
" adoption, and the aſſurances of his
" invariable love and faithfulneſs, and
" ſhall I not refer it to him to call
" me out to any ſervices or ſufferings
" that may ſeem good in his ſight?
" Let me ſtill ſay, with the firſt-be-
" gotten of the Father, who has ſet
" us an example that we ſhould fol-
" low his ſteps, The cup that my Fa-
" ther hath given me ſhall I not drink
" it?--Eſpecially ought I to ſay ſo
" when I recollect how ill I have de-
" ſerved at his hands, and how juſt-
" ly he might ſtrip me of every com-
" fort and conſign me over to thoſe
" dark manſions where there is weep-
" ing and gnaſhing of teeth. It is
" mercy that ſpares me out of Hell:
" and thanks to a good God, I am
" not only ſpared but amply provided
" for. If the Almighty has taken away
" one enjoyment and friend, he has gi-
" ven, or continued many more; and I
" have reaſon to be thankful that thoſe
" now removed were beſtowed at all,

" and

" and were ſpared ſo long, rather than
" complain of their removal now.
" Beſides, I have this farther conſi-
" deration to reconcile me to every
" event, that my GOD can and will
" do me good in and by all. I need
" theſe chaſtiſements; my heavenly
" father ſees that I do, or he would
" not inflict them: for he never af-
" flicts willingly, or for his own plea-
" ſure.—And if, when the fathers of
" our fleſh corrected us, we gave them
" reverence, ſhall we not much more
" be in ſubjection to the father of
" ſpirits and live? for they verily,
" for a few days, chaſtened us after
" their own pleaſure; but he does it
" for our profit that we may be par-
" takers of his holineſs. No chaſten-
" ing for the preſent, ſeemeth to be
" joyous but grievous, nevertheleſs
" afterward it yieldeth the peaceable
" fruit of righteouſneſs to them that
" are exerciſed thereby. And have I
" reaſon to believe that an end im-
" portant as that is to be anſwered by
" afflictions, and that ſuch an im-
" provement

" provement in grace in the preſent
" ſtate is to be crowned with a far
" more exceeding and eternal weight
" of glory in the world to come? then
" may I ever be able to ſay (with that
" great apoſtle, who aſſures me of this
" truth) For this cauſe I faint not; yea
" rather rejoice in tribulation; finding,
" by happy experience, that though the
" outward man periſh, yet the inward
" man is renewed day by day."——May
this ever be your rejoicing as well as mine,

Who am, &c.

LETTER IV.

On the religious obſervation of the Sabbath.

CONvinced as you are, my Philetus, that it is in GOD you live, and move, and have your being, you will I hope eſteem it your duty to acknowledge him in all your ways, and to maintain and manifeſt an habitual ſenſe of your dependance upon him and your obligations to him. Whereever you are, whether at home or abroad, alone or in company, remember, I intreat you, that GOD is there. Begin, ſpend, and conclude every day in his fear: But eſpecially that day, which is ſet apart for himſelf, and for the exerciſes of communion with him. The practice of the chriſtian church, both in the primitive and the preſent

preſent age, is ſufficient to tell you what day you are to keep as the chriſtian ſabbath. The ſeventh day from the beginning of the creation, was ſanctified by GOD as a day of Reſt, upon his having finiſhed that great work on the ſixth. And ſome, of the firſt eminence in the learned world, have thought that the day which we now reckon the firſt day of the week is the ſame. But whether it be ſo or not, it is plain that the firſt miniſters and members of the chriſtian church, kept this firſt day of the week holy to the Lord, and imployed it in the exerciſes of devotion. In Acts xx. 7. it is ſaid, On the firſt day of the week, when the diſciples came together, as uſual, to break bread, Paul preached unto them. On this day we know our Lord Jeſus roſe from the dead. And this probably is the day which his beloved diſciple ſpeaks of as the Lord's-day; on which he received, from his riſen Redeemer, thoſe meſſages to the church, and thoſe diſcoveries concern-

ing it, which are recorded in the book of the Revelation.

One day in ſeven has been, by divine appointment, ſet apart for GOD ever ſince the creation. "GOD bleſ-"ſed the ſeventh day and ſanctified it." And he gave it in charge to his people, to keep up the ſacred inſtitution, inſerting it among thoſe laws which were intended to be a rule of life to all mankind as long as the ſun and moon ſhall endure.—Remember the ſabbath-day to keep it holy: ſix days ſhalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the ſeventh day is the ſabbath of the Lord thy GOD; in it thou ſhalt not do any work, thou, nor thy ſon, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-ſervant, nor thy maid-ſervant, nor thy cattle, nor thy ſtranger that is within thy gates; for in ſix days the Lord made heaven and earth, the ſea, and all that in them is, and reſted the ſeventh day; wherefore the Lord bleſſed the ſabbath-day and hallowed it.—We are hereby allowed ſix days out of the ſeven for the common employments of life, and

if

if you improve them wiſely and diligently, you will have no occaſion to break in upon the Sabbath. I know not how the thought affects your mind, but it often gives me a very painful concern, that thoſe who ſeem to grudge no labour or time all the reſt of the week for the meat that periſheth, ſhould think much of employing one day in ſeven in ſeeking after the bread of ſouls, which endureth unto eternal life. That they who riſe early, and ſit up late, and are all activity from morning to night on their own days, ſhould trifle away the precious hours of the day of the Lord, either on their beds, or in idle converſation by the fire-ſide, or in ſauntering up and down in the ſtreets and fields, as if thoſe were the only hours of the week that they knew not how to away with. Surely if we were in our right minds we ſhould long for Sabbaths as affording us a ſacred retreat from the cares, hurries, and temptations of the world; and be thankful for every opportunity we have in

them of employing our devout meditations on things ſpiritual and heavenly.—Yes, my Philetus, did we but live in the lively exerciſe of that faith which is the ſubſtance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not ſeen, much need not be ſaid to endear to us the privileges of our Sabbaths. Were we duly ſenſible of the worth of our ſouls, and the infinite importance of being made meet for the inheritance of the ſaints in light; and did we but conſider how much there is in every ſituation of life to indiſpoſe and unfit the ſoul for the entertainments and ſervices of a better world, we ſhould chuſe to be without the profit of any or every other day in the week rather than loſe the advantages of our Sabbath.—If we are wiſe for our ſouls we ſhall be much with GOD on theſe days in the exerciſes of devotion. And indeed this is no more than he hath required of us. I ſay not that we are forbidden on that day, attending to the ſupport of our own bodies; or that we ſhould neglect to ſup-

ply the wants of others. The great LORD of the Sabbath has authorized, and, in effect, commanded us, not only to take care of our neceſſitous and afflicted fellow-creatures, but likewiſe to give all neceſſary aſſiſtance to the brute creation on the Sabbath day. See Matt. xii. 1—11. Nevertheleſs, if you look into your Bible, you will find that a very ſtrict obſervation of the Sabbath was repeatedly enjoined by GOD upon his people; and that very ſevere threatnings were denounced, and the moſt awful judgments inflicted upon thoſe, who dared to profane it. In this view, beſides the command given out from mount Sinai (mentioned above) let me remind you of the meſſage recorded in the xxxiſt chapter of the ſame book of Exodus. "The "Lord ſpake unto Moſes ſaying, ſpeak "thou alſo unto the children of Iſrael, "ſaying, Verily my Sabbaths ye ſhall "keep; the Sabbath is holy, and e-"very one that defileth it ſhall ſurely "be put to death; for whoſoever doth "any work therein, that ſoul ſhall be

"cut off from amongſt his people;
"it is the Sabbath of reſt, holy unto
"the Lord." They were commanded to obſerve it as ſuch in the midſt of harveſt as well as in ſeaſons of leiſure; and GOD expreſsly ordered, by his ſervant Jeremiah (chap. xvii. 21, 22.) that no worldly buſineſs ſhould be tranſacted on the Sabbath-day. "Thus ſaith the Lord, take heed to
"yourſelves and bear no burthen on
"the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by
"the gates of Jeruſalem; neither car-
"ry forth a burden out of your houſes
"on the Sabbath-day, neither do ye
"any work; but hallow ye the Sab-
"bath-day, as I commanded your fa-
"thers."—Nehemiah bore his teſtimony freely and faithfully, againſt all ſuch profanation of the Sabbath in his time. "In thoſe days (ſays he) ſaw I
"in Judah ſome treading wine preſ-
"ſes on the Sabbath-day, and bring-
"ing in ſheaves, and lading aſſes, &c.
"And I teſtified againſt them in the
"day wherein they ſold victuals.—
"Men of Tyre brought fiſh and all
"man-

"manner of ware and ſold on the ſab-
"bath unto the children of Judah,
"and in Jeruſalem. Then I contend-
"ed with the nobles of Judah, and
"ſaid unto them, what evil thing is
"that ye do, and profane the Sab-
"bath-day? did not your fathers thus?
"and did not our God bring all this
"evil upon us and upon this city?
"and ye bring more wrath upon Iſ-
"rael by profaning the Sabbath." This good man, by exerting himſelf with due ſpirit and reſolution, put a ſtop to thoſe evil practices; theſe tranſgreſſors were made aſhamed and came no more with their carriages and merchandize on the Sabbath. It is likewiſe worth notice, that the Iſraelites were forbid to undertake journeys upon buſineſs on that day, and even to travel any farther than two thouſand cubits (little more than a mile) upon any account, except in going to and from the houſe of God. And it ſeems from the conduct of Joſeph, and the women who attended him at our Lord's funeral, that ſuch offices as embalming the

dead,

dead, were then thought unlawful on the Sabbath. It is very certain that God's people were forbid all pleasurable amusements on that day, as they desired his protection and blessing. "If thou turn away thy foot from the "Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure "on my holy day" (or, as it might be read, if thou turn away thy foot, on account of the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day) that is, if thou wilt call off thy mind from thy worldly concerns, undertake no journies, pursue no business then, and employ the hours of the day not as thine own but the Lord's, "and call "the Sabbath a delight, value and "improve it as the holy day of the "Lord, and honourable; and shalt "honour him, not doing thine own "ways, nor finding thine own plea-"sure, nor speaking thine own words; "then thou shalt delight thyself in the "Lord, and I will cause thee to ride "upon the high places of the earth "and feed thee with the heritage of "Jacob thy father, for the mouth of

"the

"the Lord hath ſpoken it." Ezekiel in his prophecies mentions Iſrael's profanation of the Sabbath among the moſt heinous crimes, and is directed to charge them with it again and again, as what was highly diſpleaſing in the ſight of God. And the neglect of his worſhip muſt certainly be ſo in all, of every age and nation under heaven. It were indeed a kind of practical atheiſm, and ſaying, in actions, what moſt would be afraid or aſhamed to ſay in ſo many words, "Who is the Lord that we "ſhould ſerve him? or what profit "ſhall we have if we pray unto "him?" But I know you eſteem it reaſonable and becoming to attend at ſuch ſeaſons upon the publick and ſocial acts of devotion. You cannot but be ſenſible that many evils would ariſe, both to individuals and the publick, from the neglect of them. Irreligion has a natural tendency to ruin men for both worlds; and to ruin neighbourhoods and nations in proportion to the degree in which it prevails

in

in them. And if there is a GOD that judges in the earth; a GOD who loveth righteouſneſs, and who is angry with the wicked every day, ſurely ſuch as caſt off fear and reſtrain prayer before him, are doing much continually to draw down his judgments both upon themſelves and their country. Let me beſeech you therefore, my Philetus, by the tender regard you owe to the preſent and future well-being of all around you, as you would approve yourſelf a follower of Jeſus, whoſe cuſtom we are told it was to attend upon publick worſhip on the Sabbath-day; as you would imitate GOD his Father and our Father, who reſted on the ſeventh day from all his work and ſanctified it; and indeed as you would teſtify your regard to all the worthieſt precedents and higheſt authorities, both human and divine, remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy, and forſake not the aſſemblies of GOD's people as the manner of ſome is *.—As I have mentioned human

* Heb. x. 25.

man authorities, let me beg your patience while I tranſcribe a clauſe or two from ſome acts of Parliament, now lying before me, the obſervation of which I could wiſh to ſee more ſtrictly adhered to and univerſally enforced among us.

It is enacted that "No carrier with "any horſe or horſes, nor waggoner "with any waggon, &c. nor drover "with any cattle ſhall, by themſelves "or any other, travel on the Lord's-"day on pain of twenty ſhillings; or "if any Butcher, by himſelf, or any "other for him with his privity and "conſent, ſhall kill or ſell any victual "on the Lord's-day, he ſhall forfeit "ſix ſhillings and eight pence. The "conviction to be in ſix months be-"fore a Juſtice, to be levied by the "conſtable or church-warden by diſ-"treſs to be applied to the uſe of the "poor, &c."

And it is further enacted "That no "Drover, Horſe-Courſer, Waggoner, "Butcher, Higler, or any of their "ſervants ſhall travel or come to his

"inn

" inn or lodging on the Lord's-day on
" pain of twenty ſhillings. And in
" general that no tradeſman, artificer,
" workman, labourer, or other per-
" ſon ſhall do, or exerciſe, any world-
" ly labour, buſineſs or work of their
" ordinary callings on the Lord's-day
" (except works of neceſſity and cha-
" rity) on pain of every offender, a-
" bove fourteen years of age, forfeit-
" ing five ſhillings, and alſo that no
" perſon ſhall publickly cry, ſhew
" forth, or expoſe to ſale any wares,
" merchandizes, fruit, herbs, goods,
" or chattels whatſoever on the Lord's-
" day (except milk and mackrel in
" London before and after divine ſer-
" vice) on pain of forfeiting the ſame,
" which may be ſeized on warrant
" granted to the conſtables or church-
" wardens by the Juſtice upon the
" information of one witneſs within
" three months after the offence, and
" given to the poor, or one third to
" the informer. And for want of diſ-
" treſs the offender ſhall be ſet pu-
" blickly in the ſtocks for two hours.

" More-

" Moreover it is enacted that all per-
" ſons, not having reaſonable excuſe,
" ſhall reſort to their pariſh church or
" chapel, or to ſome congregation of
" religious worſhip allowed by the
" Toleration-act, on every Lord's-day,
" on pain of forfeiting one ſhilling to
" the poor for every offence, to be
" levied by the church-wardens by
" diſtreſs by warrant of one Juſtice."

I have made theſe few extracts not ſo much upon your own account, as to give you an opportunity of obſerving how far the Laws of our Land relating to the Sabbath are obſerved by its inhabitants; and I pray GOD to diſpoſe you and every one to all proper meaſures for promoting a due regard to the Laws of GOD and your Country.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

On the public ordinances of religion.

IT has been juſtly obſerved that the all-wiſe former of our nature has adapted our Religion to our make; and that, as we conſiſt of bodies as well as ſouls, and are endowed with corporeal ſenſes as well as rational powers, he requires bodily as well as ſpiritual worſhip, and commands us not only to employ the faculties of our minds in proper devotional exerciſes, but alſo to expreſs our inward devotion in ſuitable external actions. We are likewiſe evidently intended for ſociety; and as our maker has formed us with capacities both of body and mind, and implanted in us a natural diſpoſition for it, it becomes

us to wait upon him jointly and publickly in the ordinances which he has appointed. Thoſe ordinances are adminiſtered in the ſanctuary on the Lord's-day; and I hope you are glad when it is ſaid unto you "Let us go "up unto the houſe of the Lord." There you are called to attend upon the reading of the ſcriptures. Moſes (that is his written law) was read in the jewiſh ſynagogues, together with the books of the prophets in our Lord's time, every Sabbath-day; and both he and his diſciples uſually attended upon the reading of them; nay they adopted the cuſtom themſelves. And Paul gave it in charge to the churches at Coloſſe and Theſſalonica, to ſee to it that his epiſtles were read publickly among them, and all the holy brethren. Give diligent heed, I beſeech you, when the oracles of truth and of GOD are in your ears, leſt at any time you ſhould let them ſlip.

And join likewiſe in ſocial and publick prayer. Mine houſe, ſays GOD, ſhall be called an houſe of prayer for

all people. Formerly the Jew was diſtinguiſhed from the Gentile, by a nearer acceſs to GOD in his ſanctuary; but now in Chriſt Jeſus both have the ſame acceſs by one Spirit to the Father. And we are informed that the apoſtles, ſenſible of the value of the privilege and thankful for it, went immediately after their Lord's aſcenſion, into a room where prayer was wont to be made, and all continued with one accord in prayer and ſupplication. Let us follow their example.—And attend not upon this, Philetus, merely as a ſervice performed by another, but, as far as you conſcientiouſly can, make every petition, acknowledgment and thankſgiving that is offered by the miniſter, your own act of worſhip, by cheriſhing the ſentiments and affections in your own breaſt which are expreſſed as in your name before the throne of GOD.—Another part of the ſervice in which you are to engage in the houſe of GOD is ſinging his praiſes, which is indeed a very delightful and uſeful part of it. So the patriarchs

and

and prophets accounted it in old time: and it comes recommended to the chriſtian church by the practice of its divine Lord, and the repeated injunctions of his apoſtles. "Let the "word of Chriſt (ſaith Paul) dwell "richly in you in all wiſdom, teaching and admoniſhing one another in "pſalms and hymns and ſpiritual "ſongs, ſinging with grace in your "hearts to the Lord." When performed thus, it affords a delightful foretaſte of the entertainment of heaven; as well as a pleaſing ſpecimen of the employ of thoſe celeſtial worſhippers who "ſing the ſong of Moſes "and the lamb in his upper temple." —You are likewiſe to attend upon the preaching of the word of God in the ſanctuary. Our Lord, in ſome of his laſt inſtructions to his miniſters before his aſcenſion to heaven, ordered them to go forth to preach the goſpel to every creature. And they readily obeyed his command. Paul preached to the diſciples on the firſt day of the week when they were met together for di-

vine worſhip. And Luke ſpeaks of it (in his hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles) as the ſtated cuſtom of that great chriſtian divine to reaſon with them out of the ſcriptures, and to preach unto them Jeſus: Therein himſelf ſubſerving the great ends of the chriſtian miniſtry, which, he has informed the church, was for perfecting of the ſaints, and the edifying of the body of Chriſt. Attend therefore diligently upon the miniſtration of his ſervants. Be ſwift to hear, and receive with meekneſs the ingrafted word by which (under the influences of divine grace) many have been begotten again to be a kind of firſt fruits of his creatures; and which is able to make you wiſe unto ſalvation through faith in Chriſt Jeſus. "He "that turneth away his ear from "hearing the word, even his prayer "ſhall be an abomination*." I hope you eſteem the ordinances of the goſpel, and can ſay, from the heart, with an ancient devout worſhipper, "How

* Prov. xxviii. 9.

"How amiable are thy tabernacles O "Lord of Hoſts, a day in thy courts "is better than a thouſand elſe-"where." Your regard to the preſence and authority of Chriſt will not ſuffer you to ſpend your ſabbaths at a diſtance from the place were his honour dwells. "Thoſe who do, "(ſays a ſerious writer) live after the "imagination of their own hearts; "as if there was no king in Zion, "and as though they thought they "might reſpect or ſlight the inſtitu-"tions of heaven at pleaſure." But a due ſenſe of your need of them, for your eſtabliſhment and growth in grace, and the pleaſure and benefit which you may hope to derive from them, will, I truſt, endear them to you as long as you live. You can indeed pray and meditate and read at home; and it is your mercy that you can; nor would you do well to neglect any of thoſe duties there. But you ought to remember, that every thing that you would do with propriety and advantage muſt be done in its ſea-

ſeaſon. GOD has not required ſuch an attendance upon the publick ordinances of his houſe as ſhould interfere with the private duties of our own: yet, on the other hand, we cannot reaſonably expect his bleſſing upon any devotional exerciſes in which we engage at home, when we ought to be worſhiping him in the aſſembly of his ſaints. He ſaid of the place ſet apart for the publick adminiſtration of his ordinances of old, that he loved it more than all the dwellings of Jacob. And the great head of the chriſtian church has aſſured us that he walks amidſt his golden candleſticks, and that wherever two or three are gathered together in his name there is he in the midſt of them. Thoſe therefore are offering an ungrateful affront to the maſter of aſſemblies, and forfeiting the bleſſings of his preſence and favour who forſake the aſſembling of themſelves together. And though they may ſeek for excuſes to ſilence the ſecret reproofs of their own conſciences, or the more publick admonitions of

others,

others, the day is approaching, when they will have reaſon to look back, with ſhame and ſorrow, upon every inſtance in which they have trifled away theſe ſacred ſeaſons in indolence, amuſements, or worldly buſineſs. But perhaps you obſerve few, except the moſt abandoned, who neglect publick worſhip intirely; it may be not many that neglect it often. The greater part of thoſe who ſeem deſirous to maintain any profeſſion attend at leaſt once a day.—And why not twice? Why neglect it at all? Are three or four hours in a week too many to be employed in ſuch exerciſes? Is not the ſoul valuable enough, is not eternity of ſufficient importance to deſerve that ſmall portion of our time? Did ever any chriſtian who had attended moſt conſtantly and conſcientiouſly upon publick ordinances, through a life of threeſcore years and ten, wiſh he had ſpent leſs time in them when upon a dying bed, and juſt within ſight of eternity? Oh eternity! Keep that much in view; realize your own concern in

it;

it; and you cannot make light of any of the inſtitutions of religion. You will then rather contrive and take pains to ſecure opportunities of attending upon them. You will be willing to forego your own eaſe, your carnal pleaſures, your worldly gain, and to ſubmit to many leſſer inconveniences rather than be deprived of thoſe means which GOD has appointed to train you up for the buſineſs and bleſſedneſs of a better world, eſpecially conſidering how ſoon they may be taken from you, or you from them; and the awfully ſtrict account you muſt give another day, for the advantages you have, or might have, enjoyed under them.—— May you obtain mercy of the LORD in that day! Farewell!

LET-

LETTER VI.

On a due attendance upon publick worſhip.

A Serious mind, my Philetus, cannot think of the indifference with which ſome treat the ordinances of the ſanctuary, without a painful concern. Yet in this, as in many other things, men diſcover a ſad propenſity to run into diſhonourable and hurtful extremes.—While you juſtly dread incurring the guilt of thoſe who ſpeak of the duties of devotion with contempt, and think ſobriety and charity the whole of religion, I cannot wiſh you ſhould be tempted to think every hour loſt that is not employed in the houſe of GOD. To every thing there is a proper ſeaſon, and a time to every lawful purpoſe under heaven.

A time

A time for the publick devotions of the ſanctuary, a time for the religious duties of the family, and a time, no doubt, for the buſineſs of the ſhop and the field as well as both. In the ſame ſcriptures that exhort us to draw near to GOD, is that command, "Be "diligent to know the ſtate of thy "flock and look well to thy herd." The ſame bible that commends the piety of Mary, who ſat at her Lord's feet to hear his heavenly diſcourſes, bears a moſt honourable teſtimony to the virtuous woman who worketh willingly with her hands, looketh well to her houſhold, and eateth not the bread of idleneſs. And Paul, you know, ſays expreſsly, that if any man provide not for his own relatives and friends wherever they are, and eſpecially for thoſe who, as being in his own houſe, are committed to his more immediate care, he has denied the faith, and is worſe than an infidel, who never profeſſed any regard to religion, or the word of GOD. So far would ſuch an one be from acting in a manner

ner well pleaſing to his divine Lord, even though he ſhould have this to urge, as an excuſe for his neglect, that his time was taken up in the exerciſes of devotion. The ſad effects of this extreme have been ſufficiently felt by multitudes, to convince every one, who thinks ſoberly, of the folly and guilt of ſuch a conduct. Many families, it is well known, have been left, by perſons of this unhappy turn, in a miſerable condition at home, while they, who ought to have been taking care to feed and cloath them with decency, have (like the Athenians, ſo juſtly cenſured in ſcripture) "been "ſpending their time in nothing elſe "but telling or hearing ſome new "thing *." Sad confuſion has, by this means, been introduced among near relations, and members of the ſame family, who lived comfortably and uſefully with each other before. Much of their time has been trifled away, and their ſubſtance waſted, if not by themſelves, by their domeſtics, at home, while they have been con-

* Acts xvii. 21.

tracting habits of idleneſs abroad. Their itching ears and unſteady tempers have been attended with an obſtinate diſreliſh to all appearances of regularity and moderation; and have, in ſome inſtances, produced ſuch diſcords in chriſtian ſocieties, as have been a diſgrace to a religious profeſſion, and a great diſadvantage to the intereſt of practical godlineſs, and to the peace and proſperity of thoſe parts of the kingdom where this ignorant zeal has moſt abounded. And it is likewiſe to be remembered, that ſuch unſeaſonable and diſorderly attendances upon publick worſhip, are by no means adapted to anſwer thoſe ends, which every judicious chriſtian would propoſe, and for which the ordinances of the goſpel were inſtituted. Keep thoſe ends in view, and purſue them in that way which GOD has recommended in his word, and then you may chearfully hope for his bleſſing. They that thus wait upon the LORD ſhall renew their ſtrength, ſhall mount up with wings as eagles, ſhall run and not be

be weary, ſhall walk and not faint. I truſt you are ſenſible of your need of ſuch ſupplies of divine grace, and of their ineſtimable value; and I am perſuaded you are well aware that GOD has uſually communicated them in this way. Indeed he has ſaid expreſsly that his word ſhall not return unto him void, but ſhall accompliſh that which he pleaſes, and proſper in the thing whereunto he ſent it. And, by another of his ſervants, he gives us reaſon to expect that they who are planted in the houſe of the Lord, ſhall flouriſh in the courts of their GOD, and bring forth fruit even to old age; the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are, through Jeſus Chriſt, to the praiſe and glory of GOD.

I truſt, my Philetus, the ſenſe you feel of the worth of the ſoul, of the infinite importance of your ſpiritual and eternal intereſts, and the value of thoſe means of grace, will make you glad when it is ſaid unto you, let us go up to the houſe of GOD. The goſpel-hiſtory informs us that it was

our Lord's cuſtom to attend upon the worſhip of GOD every ſabbath-day. 'Tis a good cuſtom, recommended by a good and great authority: 'tis a pity and a ſhame it ſhould be loſt among any that call themſelves his diſciples. There is but too little of the power of godlineſs amongſt us with all the advantages of our ſabbaths; but I am perſuaded there would be much leſs without them; and that there is leſs where they are ſlighted, and the publick duties of them often neglected. I hope you will never ſatisfy yourſelf in attending divine inſtitutions one ſabbath and abſenting yourſelf another; or being at publick worſhip one part of the day, and ſpending the other at home, or in the fields. You will find your account in filling up your place ſtatedly in the houſe of GOD; and you cannot but be apprehenſive that unſteadineſs, in this reſpect, muſt greatly hinder your improvement. But as you would wiſh the beſt ends of publick ordinances may be anſwered, let me intreat you

to employ ſome time in devout meditation and prayer before you go to attend them. If Solomon's advice is worth regard at all times, you muſt acknowledge it peculiarly ſo when you are going to the houſe of GOD, "Keep thy heart with all diligence!" I doubt not but you often feel it in a frame unfit for ſacred ſervice; and you will find it more ſo if you go to it immediately from worldly company and employments, with the head and heart filled with its cares or pleaſures. If the Iſraelite would appear before GOD prepared according to the preparation of the ſanctuary, he was commanded to enter it with caution: "Keep thy foot when thou "goeſt to the houſe of GOD." And if the Chriſtian deſires to reap benefit from his ſeaſons of devotion; if he wiſhes to enjoy GOD in them, and to be forever the better for them; he muſt take pains with a deceitful and trifling heart, to prepare it to ſeek GOD: he muſt retire, and read, and meditate to get it in tune for the ſer-

vice: he muſt ſeek aſſiſtance and a bleſſing from heaven in it: muſt think ſeriouſly before hand of the perfections of that GOD into whoſe preſence he is going, of the ſacred and ſolemn nature of the ſervice in which he is about to engage; of the worth of his religious privileges, and the account he muſt give, another day, of the manner in which he improves them. And you will, I know, excuſe the freedom, if I caution you againſt inattention and drowſineſs under ordinances, and intreat you to give diligent heed to the things that you hear, leſt at any time you ſhould let them ſlip. And guard againſt vain imaginations in the preſence of GOD. Many thoughts that might be proper and uſeful at other ſeaſons, would be impertinent and hurtful intruders there. Keep all worldly cares as much as poſſible at a diſtance in every religious ſervice in which you would wiſh to find acceptance with GOD, or benefit to your own ſoul. The moſt high, whom we worſhip, cannot but be diſpleaſed with

ſuch

ſuch as come and ſit before him as his people ſit, and with their mouths profeſs much eſteem, but, at the ſame time, ſuffer their hearts to be going after their covetouſneſs. Let not the eye rove from one object to another in the houſe of GOD: that neceſſarily leads off the attention both from GOD and his worſhip, and often proves an inlet to hurtful temptations: and if you ſleep under ordinances, you thereby ſhut the avenues by which divine inſtructions ſhould enter into the ſoul, as well as offer an open affront to the great maſter of aſſemblies. Stir up the heart to take hold of GOD. And let me exhort you likewiſe to receive with all meekneſs the ingrafted word. Be willing to be taught your duty and exhorted to the performance of it. Let it be your concern to profit by every caution and reproof, as well as by every invitation and promiſe, of the word of God. Only let me ſuggeſt one hint more; retire for ſerious recollection and prayer, when you return home from ordinances. If you deſire

ſire ſolid and laſting advantage from them, you muſt not only refrain from worldly buſineſs, and all carnal pleaſures, when you come from the houſe of GOD, but ſhould keep, as much as poſſible, out of the way of vain and trifling converſation, and ſuch company as are diſpoſed for it. Go from the ſanctuary to the cloſet, and there endeavour to recollect the inſtructions you have received, and the ſolemn tranſactions in which you have been engaging. If any good impreſſions have been made by God's word and ordinances, take pains to preſerve and cheriſh them. Acknowledge the ſins of your holy things freely before GOD, lament over miſimproved privileges, and reſolve that for the future, if ſpared to the return of thoſe ſacred ſolemnities, you will watch unto prayer with greater reſolution and ſerioufneſs; and let it be your conſtant ſolicitude that you may be a doer of the word, and not a hearer only, deceiving your own ſoul. Be aſſured, if you thus take pains, with humility and diligence,

to

to apply what you hear for your good, you will find your account in it. Thus may you hope to find that, while divine inſtructions, like ſeeds ſcattered by the way's ſide, are utterly loſt on the ignorant, unbelieving, and careleſs hearers, they will enter and take deep root in your heart, and bring forth fruit an hundred fold. Wiſhing you this and every other bleſſing,

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

On the unprofitableneſs of publick ordinances.

YOU remind me, Philetus, of what is ſaid concerning the ancient Iſraelites, "that the word "preached did not profit them;" and I readily acknowledge with you, that many beſides them have attended upon divine inſtitutions to very little purpoſe. We hear one and another of the ſervants of GOD complaining, I have laboured in vain and ſpent my ſtrength for nought: and with others, this is literally true. The proud, the paſſionate, the cenſorious, the ſlothful, the worldly minded, are ſo ſtill: And while they continue ſuch, under divine inſtructions, they hear and read to very little purpoſe. After many years attendance upon the ordinances of the goſpel, Chriſtians

Chriſtians themſelves are complaining of the weakneſs of their faith, and the ſad prevalence of their fears; the power of ſin within them, and the ſhameful influence of temptations to evil. And, what is ſtill worſe, in other inſtances where there is yet more apparent reaſon for ſuch complaints, there ſeems to be but little, very little concern about the matter. I wonder not that the obſervation of ſuch things ſhould give you concern; eſpecially while apprehenſive, as you ſeem to be, for yourſelf, that you have "frequented "ed GOD's holy place, and ſat under "the preaching of his word almoſt in "vain." The caſe is truly lamentable.—Valuable as our privileges are under the goſpel; important and glorious as its deſign is; much as creatures in our ignorant guilty and polluted circumſtances need it; happily as it is adapted, to raiſe us to the higheſt excellence of character, and the moſt perfect ſtate of felicity of which our natures are capable; numerous as the inſtances have been in which thoſe great

great ends have been anſwered by it; and miſerable as we muſt be if its deſign is not anſwered upon us, it may juſtly alarm us to think of ſpending our lives under this miniſtration of grace in vain; eſpecially as we know it cannot be merely in vain: a truſt of this conſequence muſt be accounted for, and it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for thoſe who continue in the condition of the fruitleſs fig-tree in GOD's choiceſt vineyard, under the favourable influence of heaven, and the conſtant cultivation of his ſervants. But I would hope, in ſome inſtances, the ordinances of the goſpel may do good where the effect is not very apparent, either to thoſe who adminiſter them, or even to ſuch perſons themſelves as attend upon them. Some Chriſtians ſeem diſappointed and offended, as if no good could be done either to themſelves or others, if they don't always meet with ſome peculiarly favourite topics and phraſes in every publick miniſtration upon which they attend

attend; not conſidering the extenſiveneſs of the Goſpel, and the vaſt variety of doctrines, precepts and promiſes contained in it; nor ſufficiently attending to this plain truth, that though the end of its diſcoveries is one (viz. the ſalvation of man) yet the means by which this end is to be promoted are various. It is certainly the duty of chriſtian miniſters to declare the whole counſel of GOD; and they muſt bring out of their treaſures a variety of things, both new and old, if they would approve themſelves ſcribes well inſtructed unto the kindom of heaven, and give every one his portion in due ſeaſon. And you will, I hope, always remember, that if any thing be ſaid that (through the divine bleſſing) is effectual to enlighten and enlarge the underſtanding, or to enliven the beſt affections of the ſoul; to convince of ſin, or to eſtabliſh in the ways of GOD; to ſubdue the remainder of irregular appetite and paſſion, or to improve your acquaintance with GOD and Chriſt, and your own heart,

or to revive and ſtrengthen the graces of the Chriſtian within you, when they are almoſt ready to die; as you have therein ſomething to promote your meetneſs for a better world, and to render your paſſage through this more happy, honourable and uſeful, you have then found it good for you to wait upon GOD.

But you ſeem to think, that in many inſtances you have experienced but little of the benefit of publick ordinances in any of theſe reſpects. Let me intreat you to look ſeriouſly into the occaſions of the complaints. Whence is it, think you, that the word preached does not profit you? In ſome inſtances, I will allow, it may in a great meaſure, be owing to thoſe by whom it is diſpenſed; if the preacher be groſsly ignorant or ſlothful, eſpecially if, inſtead of being an example to the flock, he practices the ſins he condemns, it is no wonder if his miniſtrations ſhould be in vain; and it muſt be confeſſed, that even miniſters of the beſt characters, and

the brighteſt talents, are attended with ſuch imperfections as may have, at times, an unhappy influence upon their uſefulneſs. But let me remind you, that the ſucceſs of the goſpel depends not intirely upon them that preach it, but upon GOD. Remember what the great apoſtle ſaid with reſpect to himſelf and his fellow-labourer, Apollos, "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but GOD that giveth the increaſe." Nevertheleſs let me charge it upon you, that when you fail of benefit from the word preached, you do not throw the blame upon God. Examine yourſelf, and you will ſoon find where it is to be laid. We are told in the word of truth, for the encouragement both of miniſters and people, that he who goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious ſeed, ſhall doubtleſs come again rejoicing bringing his ſheaves with him. We may reſt aſſured, that no ſincere attempts, either to do good or to get good by the word and ordinances of GOD,

ſhall be entirely loſt. When you have attended them in vain, you will ordinarily find that it was for want of attending in a proper manner, and particularly for want of ſeeking the divine bleſſing upon them. If you wiſh, for the time to come, to receive real advantage from the preaching of the word, ſee to it that you take more pains in preparing your heart for it, and in your attendance upon it. Don't think lightly of the ordinances of Chriſt, or of thoſe who faithfully adminiſter them. You cannot ſlight them without ſlighting him, nor neglect attending upon them without wronging your own ſouls. Think not, with the Laodiceans, that you are rich and encreaſed with goods, and ſtand in need of nothing, but cultivate a due ſenſe of your ſpiritual neceſſities, and wait for every deſireable ſupply of divine grace in the uſe of thoſe means, by which the great head of the church has been uſed to communicate them. Be equally upon your guard againſt both thoſe extremes, into which hearers ſo commonly

monly run: On the one hand, do not make light of ordinances or miniſters, nor on the other, abſolutely depend upon them. If you deſire that the goſpel may be a ſavour of life unto life to you, honour the God of ordinances ſupremely in your attendance upon it. Miniſters are but inſtruments, and ordinances but means, by which one believeth, and another is built up in our holy faith, as God giveth to every man. The ineſtimable bleſſings of the goſpel are committed to earthen veſſels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of men. It is enough therefore if you account of miniſters as ſtewards of the myſteries of God, and attend upon divine inſtitutions as ſtreams which owe both their virtue and continuance to him with whom is the fountain of life. Both miniſters and people need the influence of his Spirit to give them aſſiſtance and ſucceſs. This (thanks be to God) is graciouſly promiſed to both: make it your concern therefore daily to ſeek it.

If you wiſh your miniſter to be made uſeful to your ſoul, earneſtly and frequently pray for him, particularly when you are going to attend upon his labours; and do not forget to pray for yourſelves, that GOD would teach you to profit, and cauſe his goſpel to come, not in word only, but alſo in the demonſtration of the Spirit and with power.—There is one thing more which I muſt here ſtrongly recommend to you, and that is, conſtancy and ſteadineſs in your attendance upon divine inſtitutions. The tree that is planted in a good ſoil and keeps its place, grows and brings forth fruit, while ſuch as are often moved up and down look ſickly, wither and die. If you deſire the benefit of ordinances, chuſe a ſerious judicious miniſtry and keep to it; thoſe who rove about from place to place, loſe many advantages, indulge an unſettled temper, contract a taſte for novelty, and ſuffer their attention to be diverted from the important, practical and ſaving ends of divine inſtitutions, greatly to their own hurt

hurt and that of the rising generation; and such too often prove as thorns in the sides of God's faithful ministers, as well as the sad occasions of discord in christian societies. Such have no reason to wonder if the word preached does not profit them, though they may justly lament it; and while they do lament it, they ought never to forget that they carry the sad occasion of this evil about with them, in the trifling and unsteady temper with which they attend upon divine ordinances.—From the tendereſt regard to your spiritual improvement, I pray God to keep you from every thing so injurious to it,

And am, &c.

LET-

LETTER VIII.

On private devotion.

I Hope, my Philetus, you will not think the exercises of devotion in publick sufficient, but that you will endeavour to secure time for them in private. Even in your busy hours you may find time for ejaculatory addresses of the soul to God; and I am persuaded that, with proper attention, you may find somewhat, in every day's experience and observation, to assist and animate you in such exercises: somewhat to teach you caution, humility and a godly fear; to confirm your faith in the invisible realities of the world to come, and to inspire you with an high esteem of the blessed God, and a most affectionate love to his son Jesus Christ; to inculcate a grate-

grateful ſenſe of divine favours, and to excite holy and ardent deſires after a better ſtate, in which all the diſorders and imperfections of this ſhall be done away.—But it will be your wiſdom to retire frequently from the world, and all its hurries, temptations and cares, to preſerve theſe ſentiments and affections more ſteadily in the mind, and impreſs them more powerfully upon it.—This you know Jeſus Chriſt himſelf has recommended; "Thou when thou prayeſt, enter into "thy cloſet, and when thou haſt ſhut "the door, pray to thy father who "is in ſecret, and thy father who "ſeeth in ſecret, ſhall reward thee "openly*." I doubt not but you have read this paſſage often, and are convinced that the practice therein recommended, is perfectly reaſonable. Jeſus who recommended it, you well know, was frequently engaged in it himſelf; and it appears to have made a very conſiderable part of the employment and happineſs of thoſe ancient

* Matt. vi 6.

cient worthies, who walked with GOD in the earlier ages of his church. Abraham was much with GOD in prayer. His ſon Iſaac retired for devout meditations into the fields. Jacob was eminent for devotion; who, in the ſtrength of his faith in GOD and his affection to him, ſaid, "I will not "let thee go except thou bleſs me;" and as a prince we are told he had power with GOD, and prevailed. Moſes, David, and Hezekiah, princes in Iſrael, as well as the prophets Iſaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, Daniel, and many more, were men of prayer: indeed this appears to have been an important and diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of the people of GOD in all ages. Permit me then to addreſs our Lord's exhortation to you: enter into thy cloſet daily to pour out the ſoul freely before him who ſeeth in ſecret.—If you have a heart for the ſervice, I make no doubt but you may and will find a place for it, ſome where or other, "He (ſaid one of the chriſtian fa-"thers) that carries his temple about

"with

"with him, never need want a place "to pray in." A devout mind may indeed enjoy, at times, ſome of the pleaſures of a religious retirement in the midſt of a family; and better is it to ſubmit to ſome inconveniences, and perform the duty with ſome diſadvantages, than never to perform it at all. But a retired ſituation is much to be deſired, and if you cannot find a proper oratory, or place for prayer, within doors, ſeek it without. For the ſake of retirement, you know Iſaac went out into the fields; Peter to the houſe-top, and Jeſus to a mountain to pray.

But you tell me you find ſo much amiſs in your heart and life, as makes you afraid to pray; afraid leſt your prayer, like that of the wicked, ſhould be an abomination to the Lord. And ſo indeed it would be if, while you aſk his bleſſing, you are ſaying unto him in your heart, "depart "from me, for I deſire not the "knowledge of thy ways." The hypocrite is rejected by that God who can-

cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked, but he that offereth the ſacrifice of a ſincere and contrite heart, though he hath nothing more to bring, ſhall meet with a favourable reception through Jeſus Chriſt, the compaſſionate high-prieſt of our profeſſion, at the right hand of GOD, who perfumes our ſacrifices, by the incenſe of his merit, and procures them acceptance with the father. Solomon having aſſured us that the ſacrifice of the wicked (though ever ſo coſtly, and offered with the moſt ſanctified appearances) is an abomination to the Lord, has immediately added, "but "the prayer of the upright is his "delight."

But let me intreat you, my Philetus, to look ſeriouſly into your own heart, and inquire whether you do really omit prayer becauſe you are afraid of offending GOD in it. The heart, you well know, is deceitful; and we may ſometimes perhaps, be indulging our pride under the appearance of humility. While you apprehend that a ſenſe

of

of your own unworthineſs, and a religious awe of GOD have induced you to reſtrain prayer before him, have you not been ſacrificing to your own vanity? Some, it is to be feared, repeat the acknowledgments of their imperfections to ſet off the graces of their characters to greater advantage. But where there is little of this pride, there is often a timorous, baſhful diſpoſition, a ſlaviſh fear, or a diſtruſt of GOD, which, though not equally criminal, is far from being advantageous to the intereſt of vital religion, and therefore is every where diſcountenanced in the divine word. Does this often keep you at a diſtance from the Almighty? Surely it ought not. He has ſaid, "Come and let us reaſon together; "though your ſins be as ſcarlet they "ſhall be white as ſnow; though they "be red like crimſon they ſhall be "like wool." If thou haſt fallen by iniquity, his advice to thee is, "Take with thee words and turn "unto the Lord; ſay unto him, take "away all our iniquity, and receive us

" graciouſly, and I will heal thy back-
" ſliding and love thee freely." And you know who has ſaid " Aſk and
" you ſhall receive, ſeek and you
" ſhall find, knock and it ſhall be
" opened unto you." Encouraged by ſuch gracious invitations and promiſes, the children of God, in all ages, have made him their refuge; and have fled to him with advantage, by faith, in prayer, in the moſt neceſſitous and trying ſeaſons. " Out of the depths
" (ſays one) have I cried unto thee, O
" Lord hear my voice, let thine ear
" be attentive to my ſupplications. If
" thou ſhould'ſt mark iniquity, O
" Lord who could ſtand? but there is
" forgiveneſs with thee that thou
" mayſt be feared; therefore let Iſrael
" hope in the Lord, for with the Lord
" there is mercy, and with him is
" plenteous redemption." This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and ſaved him out of all his troubles. Nor has he ſaid to the ſeed of Jacob, (or any of his praying people) ſeek ye me in vain. And yet, after all, ſhall

the

the great enemy of ſouls, and an unbelieving heart be liſtened to, rather than the word of GOD, and the experiences of his ſervants? yea, for the ſake of indulging their evil ſuggeſtions, will you reject the abundant conſolation, and good hope through grace, which GOD has ſet before you in the goſpel? will you overlook all that mercy, that rich and free love to the returning prodigal, which is publiſhed ſo frequently, and proved ſo clearly there? Having an high-prieſt that is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, let us go boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Through the blood of Jeſus we have acceſs into the holieſt of all, and are exhorted to draw near with a true heart in the full aſſurance of faith: and well we may, as he has given himſelf a ſacrifice and offering to GOD, of a ſweet ſmelling ſavour: has entered into heaven itſelf to appear in the preſence of GOD for us; and ſaid, when in our world, that whoſoever

came unto him, he would in no wiſe caſt him out; particularly inviting ſuch as were weary and heavy laden, aſſuring them that they ſhould find reſt.

Let me only obſerve, that all theſe declarations of his word evidently ſuppoſe that we accuſtom ourſelves to pray: nor do any, in the whole book of GOD, give us encouragement to hope for his favour and bleſſing in the neglect of that important duty. But you tell me, "you know not how to "pray, nor what to pray for as you "ought; you are confounded and "embarraſſed; are at a loſs both for "language and ſentiment ſuited to "your real ſtate and character, and "the ſolemnity of this ſacred ſervice." If this be a real difficulty, and one that, after repeated trials, you find at preſent unſurmountable, by no means deſpiſe the aſſiſtance of precompoſed forms, nor ſcruple to make uſe of them; at leaſt till you can pray without them. You may find ſomething ſuited to almoſt every ſituation and circumſtance

cumſtance in Patrick's devout Chriſtian, Jenks's devotions, or the prayers annexed to the ſeveral chapters in Dr. Doddridge's riſe and progreſs of religion in the ſoul. But after all you may poſſibly apprehend the difficulty to be greater than it really is. Retire; read ſome devotional paſſage in the word of GOD; meditate ſeriouſly upon it, and then make the trial again, rather than ſit ſtill, and urge the objection. "A doubting diſputing temper, "(as one obſerves) would have had "ſomething to ſay to a command like "that of our Lord to the paralitic "(Matt. ix. 6.) Ariſe, take up thy "bed and walk. I am lame, how "can I ariſe? or if I have ſtrength to "ſtand or walk, how can it be ex-"pected that I ſhould ſo ſoon be able "to carry my bed!" But reaſonings of this ſort are highly unbecoming when the command of Chriſt is in queſtion. Let it not diſcourage you that you cannot employ ſo much time in your devotions as ſome others do: neither the acceptableneſs nor the benefit of

our prayers depends upon the length of them. But you are not ſo much concerned perhaps at the ſhortneſs of your religious duties as the imperfections with which they are attended. And what are theſe imperfections? You are apprehenſive that you ſhould often be at a loſs. At a loſs! for what? Recollect yourſelf a little, and now review ſome of your ſecret tranſactions with the Almighty. You wiſh, it may be, that you could expreſs yourſelf with greater freedom and accuracy. But do you, can you, imagine that the GOD whom you worſhip, is to be pleaſed with the ſound of words, or the eaſy flow of a period? he ſays "My ſon give me thine heart." You ought not, indeed, by any means, to indulge yourſelf in indecent liberties, in ſo ſolemn an employment. But a due reverence of GOD would effectually ſecure you from every thing of that ſort. The great queſtion you ſhould attend to is—Am I ſincere in my expreſſions of adoration, repentance, and thankſgiving, and in the

petitions I offer? do I feel my heart engaged while I am preſenting them to the moſt high, and do I find a diſpoſition habitually ſuitable to ſuch ſacred tranſactions? The fervent inwrought * prayer of the righteous availeth much. You will do well to maintain a humble ſenſe of every imperfection before God. The more lowly you are the better; for the ſacrifice he requires and delights in is a broken ſpirit; a broken and a contrite heart he will not deſpiſe. Thoſe words in Pſ. cii. 17. are as ſtrong and expreſſive, as if intended to remove every objection and diſcouragement of this ſort. He will regard the prayer of the deſtitute, thoſe who ſeem to themſelves devoid of every external recommendation and ornament, and every internal encouragement and ſupport; he will not deſpiſe their prayer. And Jeſus, the faithful and compaſſionate high-prieſt of our profeſſion, aſſured his diſciples that he would give the Holy Spirit to them that aſk it

* ενεργουμενη Jam. v. 16.

it; to teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance whatever he had ſaid unto them. On that Spirit his ſervants have been uſed to rely for all neceſſary aſſiſtance in this important duty; and they have frequent occaſion humbly and gratefully to acknowledge their obligations to it. When they know not of themſelves what to pray for as they ought, he helps their infirmities, or (according to the gloſs of a learned commentator upon that expreſſion) "he lends "his helping hand, as one helps "another to raiſe or bear a burden, "by taking hold of it on one ſide, "and lifting or bearing it with them, "ſo ſeeming to intimate the obliga-"tions on us to exert our little "ſtrength, feeble as it is, in concur-"rence with this Almighty aid." Adieu! my Philetus,

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

The ſame Subject continued.

YOU complain, my Philetus, of the want of a proper diſpoſition for prayer when you ſhould engage in it. At one time the mind is hurried with the cares of the world, and almoſt overwhelmed with its troubles; at another, its pleaſures or profits engage your attention, and leave you but little inclination to converſe with GOD at the hour of prayer. And does this really grieve you? If it does you will not neglect the proper preparatives for this ſacred ſervice, much leſs run needleſsly into thoſe very ſituations and employments that have, in times paſt, rendered you unfit for communion with GOD, or ſuch as you have reaſon to think would have that unhappy tendency. Yet you will ſay, "What muſt I do when this has been

"un-

"unavoidable, and when, in conſe-
"quence of it, I feel little or no
"heart for retirement?" What can you do better than go and pray for it? A long continued neglect of the exerciſes of devotion, will do nothing to remove the evil you complain of. Nay, that muſt neceſſarily continue and encreaſe it. Your duty in ſuch circumſtances, is to compoſe your ſpirits as much as may be, when drawing nigh to GOD, and to apply yourſelf ſeriouſly and in good earneſt, to this ſacred ſervice; and when you have more time, take more pains to prepare the heart to ſeek GOD. Reading a Pſalm or devotional chapter, and meditating cloſely upon it before prayer, may probably, under GOD, do much to remove the difficulty, and render the whole an entertaining and uſeful employment. Though you are by no means to expect that religious duties will be equally pleaſant at all times, or that you ſhall always have the ſame reliſh for them while on this ſide heaven. The moſt eminent Chriſtians upon earth, I

ap-

apprehend, have their languid as well as their lively ſeaſons. But this, inſtead of keeping them at a diſtance from the throne of grace, makes them more conſtant and earneſt in their applications thither for mercy to pardon their lukewarmneſs and inconſtancy and for the more abundant ſupplies of the ſpirit of Jeſus to carry on the work of faith with power. And I muſt not forbear to remind you likewiſe that much of the life and pleaſure of true devotion has often been experienced in thoſe very prayers that were begun with great languor; ſo that upon that account and all others, you will find it good for you to draw nigh to God. But you think that you have frequently prayed in vain. "You have ſought "for comforts which you have never "enjoyed, and have begged to be de-"livered from afflictions with which "you are ſtill exerciſed." And are you from thence to conclude that you have no intereſt in heaven, and that the moſt High will never hear you? by no means; your heavenly Father

may

may in ſome inſtances, withold what you aſk, to put you in mind of ſome forgotten ſins, and to ſtir you up to the diſcharge of ſome neglected duties; or it may be to make you more humble and importunate in your addreſſes to him. He ſaid of ſome of his ancient people, "I will go and return to "my place till they acknowledge "their offence and ſeek my face; in "their affliction they will ſeek me "early." And a very valuable end is anſwered by ſuch providences, if they teach us to think of our ways and turn back our wandering feet unto his teſtimonies. But do not always imagine, my Philetus, that when your requeſts are not immediately anſwered, it is becauſe the Lord has forgotten to be gracious and will be favourable no more. He may delay the bleſſing for a while to try and ſtrengthen your faith and patience, and to keep you in the lowly poſture of waiting. Paul himſelf had occaſion to apply again and again to the throne of grace before he received an an-

anſwer, "for this thing," ſays he, "I beſought the Lord thrice that it "might depart from me." And it is uncertain whether he had then the anſwer that he firſt deſired; but if not he had a better. Many things that we wiſh for, and in the enjoyment of which we ſhould promiſe ourſelves great good, would probably be not only uſeleſs but hurtful. And other events which we have dreaded and deprecated as great evils, infinite wiſdom and goodneſs has appointed for us as eſſential to our beſt intereſt. And may not you have been miſtaken, nay, are you not now convinced that you have been miſtaken, in ſome paſt inſtances, and have called evil good, and good evil? rejoice then in this that the GOD you apply to can always diſcern the things that are excellent, and will withold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. Poſſibly a gracious GOD is anſwering your prayers in a way of moſt abundant mercy, though not in that way in which you more immediately deſired his anſwer. And

if, inſtead of that joy and confidence which you wiſhed for, he is cheriſhing in the ſoul ſuch holy, humble and devout affections as may more effectually promote his glory, and your uſefulneſs here, as well as happineſs hereafter, you muſt think that it has been good for you to draw nigh to GOD. Or if, inſtead of delivering you out of your afflictions, he gives you patience under them, and makes them the means of working out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, you have reaſon to bleſs GOD for your ſickneſſes, and ſorrows, and to acknowledge that you have not ſought him in vain.

Retire therefore, I entreat you daily from a world of cares and temptations for holy converſe with GOD; and know that the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers.

Never I hope will my Philetus excuſe himſelf in the neglect of theſe ſacred exerciſes by ſaying that he has no time for engaging in them. "This "plea, ſays a late pious writer, is moſt "ſhameful

"ſhameful and trifling, and carries its "own confutation along with it: it "becomes not the mouths of thoſe "who believe a GOD and a provi-"dence; who know they ſtand in "need of his daily directions and con-"duct, protection and ſupply, and that "the ſucceſs of all their undertakings, "together with their happineſs in time "and eternity, depends upon his bleſ-"ſing and favour. We have more to "do with GOD than we have with the "world; have we time to eat, drink, "and ſleep in? time for our worldly "buſineſs, diverſions and recreations; "time for trifling viſits, and unprofit-"able converſations with our fellow-"creatures; and have we no time to "pray in? GOD allows us time ſuffi-"cient for every duty, if we are care-"ful and ſkilful duly to proportion "it." May the Father of lights ever give you that wiſdom!

I am, &c.

LETTER X.

On attending the Lord's Supper.

HAVING, my Philetus, given yourself up to the Lord in secret, let me intreat you to renew and ratify those engagements with him at his table. You are convinced that the Lord's supper is a divine institution, and yet seem at a loss to know whether it is your duty to partake of it. It gives me pleasure to find that you do not turn your back upon the house of God while it is administered, and I would hope both from your behaviour, and the respectful terms in which you speak of divine institutions in general, that you do not neglect this from a prevailing indifference to religion, and the Redeemer's interest. If indeed I could think that of you; if you habitually and wilfully lived without God in the world, and neither revered his au-

authority, nor delighted in his preſence; if you could ſet at nought both his counſels and his threatenings, and deſpiſe the bleſſings of his covenant, I could neither wonder at your neglect of this ordinance, nor encourage your attendance upon it. While of ſuch a temper and character you would be acting the part of an hypocrite in the houſe of GOD, in ſitting down with his children at his table. Indeed, I muſt ſay, with a good man; "It were much "better for our churches to continue "thin than be filled with men of the "world that have no ſincere love to the "Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and no ſerious re-"gard to his laws." The engagements of his people there, are of the moſt ſacred and ſolemn nature, and ſuch as it were impoſſible for any to enter into, ſincerely and acceptably, whoſe hearts are alienated from the life of GOD. In that ordinance we profeſs ourſelves the Lord's, before men and angels.—We declare our love to the Saviour, a grateful ſenſe of our obligations to him, and that we live by faith in and upon him,

as the bread of life that came down from heaven.

There we ſolemnly accept of GOD as our GOD, and engage to be his people in an everlaſting covenant, while partaking of the memorials of the body and blood of the great mediator, who is ſet forth as crucified before us. Redeemed by him from all iniquity, we profeſs, to be dead indeed unto Sin, and alive unto GOD through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. There we glory in his croſs, as that by which the world is crucified unto us and we are crucified unto the world; and under the conſtraining influence of his love, we engage to live unto him who has ſo loved us as to give himſelf for us. Let a man therefore examine himſelf, and look well both to the prevailing diſpoſitions of his ſoul, and to his views in approaching this ordinance, before he eat of that bread and drink of that cup. You ſay, "I have examined myſelf again "and again, and alas! find ſo much amiſs "within as makes me afraid of taking "part with the children of GOD at

"his

" his table. I cannot but think myſelf
" very unfit for it, and fear leſt when
" the king comes in to ſee his gueſts,
" I ſhould be found without the wed-
" ding garment." And are theſe, my Philetus, your real apprehenſions concerning your ſtate and character? Let me beſeech you to conſider well your reaſons for thinking this of yourſelf. The ſoul that is thus unfit for the privileges of the children of GOD upon earth, muſt certainly be unfit to be admitted into their ſociety in a better world. And can you be eaſy a day or an hour in ſuch a ſtate as that? O how dreadful will be the conſequences of leaving this world before you are reconciled unto GOD, and made meet for the inheritance of the ſaints in light! You need not the aggravated guilt of proſtituting the body and blood of the Lord to alarm your fears, or even overwhelm the ſoul in everlaſting deſtruction, if it is thus already in the gall of bitterneſs and bond of iniquity. But let me ask you again, and intreat you to inquire impartially, wherefore are

you

you thus writing bitter things againſt yourſelf, and judging yourſelf unworthy of eternal life? "You obſerve, "you ſay, ſo many imperfections in "your heart, and life; feel ſo much "langour in the other duties of devo- "tion, and often ſo much indifference "to them; your knowledge of divine "things is ſo imperfect, and your con- "formity to the image and will of "GOD and the Redeemer is ſo very "deficient; your faith is ſo weak, "your holy love ſo inconſtant; nay "you find ſo much vanity and ſin "within you, and attending every "thing you ſay or do, that you cannot "think you would be accepted of "GOD in theſe acts of Chriſtian com- "munion; and you fear leſt, after "having given yourſelf up publickly "to the Lord, you ſhould prove a "diſhonour to his name, and an occa- "ſion of reproach and grief to his "people." You ought undoubtedly to maintain a very ſerious regard to the acceptance of GOD in act of communion with him, and take care to avoid every

every thing that would be a diſgrace to a chriſtian profeſſion, and prove an occaſion of ſtumbling or offence to thoſe that are round about you. Let me therefore intreat you to inquire a little more particularly how far theſe important intereſts are likely to be affected in the preſent caſe. You are afraid leſt you ſhould not be accepted of God if you ſhould preſent yourſelf to him at his table, and are rather ready to conclude that you ſhould but be aggravating your guilt, and adding to your provocations in his ſight, if you ſhould preſume to approach it. But is this becauſe you know not whether your heart is yet right in the ſight of God? or is it becauſe you think that not only the ſincerity of the chriſtian temper, but ſome eminent improvements in it, are neceſſary to an acceptable attendance upon this ſacred ſolemnity? Surely you cannot think this ordinance intended merely for chriſtians of the higheſt attainments. Thoſe whom our Lord admitted to ſit with him at his board when he firſt inſtituted the

ordinance

ordinance had their many imperfections and weakneſſes. Their knowledge of Chriſt and his kingdom was very imperfect, their faith, in many inſtances, appeared weak, and their zeal inconſtant. Yet, as he that knew all things, knew they loved him in ſincerity, he bid them welcome to his table. And indeed were it not for the remainders of imperfection, we ſhould have little occaſion for this or any of theſe ordinances of the goſpel. We go thither, in part, to confeſs our ſins over the memorials of that Lamb of GOD who was appointed to take away the ſins of the world; and to derive from him and the father through him, thoſe ſupplies of the ſpirit which we need to perfect his good work within us, and to train us up for a place at the marriage ſupper of the Lamb in his temple above. — "Yes, you ſay, "and could I but have a good hope "of an intereſt in him; could I but "ſay to him as Peter did, "Lord "thou knoweſt all things, thou know-"eſt that I love thee." "I ſhould

"take

"take encouragement to approach "him at his table. But that is, after "all, my great difficulty: am I a "chriſtian, not only in name, but in "deed and in truth?" An important queſtion this! And let me intreat you to purſue the inquiry till you have ſome farther ſatisfaction upon it. I ſhall endeavour to aſſiſt you herein by ſetting before you, in as few words as poſſible, the characteriſtics of the real chriſtian, and the evidences of that great work in the ſoul, to which the promiſes of grace and glory are made in the ſacred writings. We are therein told that though all have ſinned and come ſhort of the glory of GOD, grace has abounded through righteouſneſs unto eternal life by Jeſus Chriſt our Lord (Read Rom. chap. III. IV. and V.)

This grace is manifeſted in reſtoring the ſinner, while here, both to the image of GOD, and a ſtate of favour and acceptance with him, through Jeſus the Mediator.

By

By theſe two grand privileges, called Sanctification and Juſtification, the heirs of promiſe are diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of mankind. And it is to be obſerved farther that theſe are always inſeparably connected with each other, and with future glory. Whom he did foreknow (ſays St. Paul) he alſo did predeſtinate to be conformed to the image of his ſon, that he might be the firſt born among many brethren; more over whom he did predeſtinate, them he alſo called; and whom he called, them he alſo juſtified, and whom he juſtified, them he alſo glorified.

Give all diligence therefore to make your calling and election ſure: the one will be an evidence to you of the other. And how are you to judge of that but by bringing yourſelf to the touchſtone of the word of GOD? That ſpeaks of the beginnings of this work in ſuch terms as theſe. Being born again, and created anew in Chriſt Jeſus; having a heart of ſtone exchanged for a heart of fleſh, and therefore becoming a new creature, both in the views and affections

affections of the ſoul, and in the external converſation and behaviour. The careleſs become thoughtful; the hard hearted, tender; the carnal, ſpiritual; the proud, humble; and the earthly minded are taught to ſet their affections upon things above, where Chriſt ſits at the right hand of God. More particularly you find in the word of God, aſſurances of mercy to thoſe who repent of ſin, who are grieved at what they ſee and hear of it in others, and painfully lament every act of it and diſpoſition to it in themſelves; who confeſs it with freedom and humility before God, and who cry daily and earneſtly for pardoning mercy, and renewing grace. Who hate ſin in all its forms and degrees, and watch and pray to be delivered from the appearances of evil. This temper is expreſly required in the word of God, and he has therein declared, that it is through Jeſus well pleaſing to him. It ſeems the deſign of our Redeemer, in his ſermon on the mount, in his parable of the prodigal ſon, and that of the publican

and phariſee, to aſſure us that ſuch penitents will be accepted of GOD. And to ſuch, his apoſtles again and again promiſed the remiſſion of ſins. The ſame bleſſing is likewiſe promiſed to thoſe that fear and love GOD, and who manifeſt their fear and love of him, as a good ſubject does his dutiful affection to a worthy prince, or an obedient child to a faithful tender parent. Such maintain a holy awe and reverence of the majeſty of heaven; deſire to avoid every thing that is diſpleaſing to him; put their truſt in him, and expreſs a ſenſe of their dependance upon him, and their ardent deſires after his favour, in prayer. They delight to attend upon his inſtitutions, rejoice in his preſence, and the light of his countenance, and love the place where his honour dwells. They deſire to glorify him continually, and to be imitators of GOD as dear children. They thankfully acknowledge their obligations to him for every good thing that they enjoy; humbly ſubmit to the moſt painful and diſtreſſing diſpoſals of his providence,

and

and are waiting and longing for a ſtate where they ſhall be near him, and devoted to him for ever; perſuaded that in his preſence there is fulneſs of joy, and at his right hand are pleaſures for evermore. And to ſuch as thus fear and love him the benignity and paternal compaſſion of the bleſſed GOD is frequently promiſed in his word. He has engaged to protect and bleſs them in all their ways; that all things ſhall work together for their good; and that after having ſatisfied them with length of days here, he will ſhew them his ſalvation hereafter; a ſalvation that ſhall not only fulfill their deſires, but far exceed even their diſtant conceptions.—Again, his favour is likewiſe promiſed to thoſe that believe in Jeſus Chriſt. There is in this faith not only a firm perſuaſion that he is the Son of GOD, the promiſed Meſſiah, and the Saviour (though that is neceſſarily implied in it) but likewiſe a cordial, ſteady, humble and grateful application and ſubjection to him as ſuch. This faith is founded on ſome acquaintance both

with him and ourſelves, and produces love, together with the fruits of holy obedience.

To you that believe, ſays Peter, he is precious. Such believers delight to think of Chriſt, and the thought of him excites an eſteem of his perſonal perfections, and a holy joy in the great undertakings of his grace. They are pleaſed with every word and ordinance that reminds them of their Lord and Saviour; they are glad to ſpeak of him and for him; they delight in his inſtitutions; they pray for his intereſt; every diſhonour done to his name, and injury to his cauſe grieves them; they deſire to walk in his ſteps, and that the ſame mind may be in them that was alſo in Chriſt Jeſus their Lord; they would be in all things ſubject to his government; are humbled for the inconſtancy of their affection and obedience; they long to love him more and ſerve him better; and are ardently aſpiring after that world where their love and ſervice ſhall be uninterrupted and everlaſting. In the mean while they are deſi-

deſirous to give him the beſt proofs they can of their fidelity, in their converſation and conduct. They live to him; and having the heart thus purified by faith and love, they have therein the witneſs within themſelves of their pardon, regeneration and adoption. Once more, the ſame bleſſings are alſo promiſed to thoſe who love the brethren; who kindly overlook the weakneſſes, and are ready to make candid allowances for the imperfections, of one anothers tempers and characters; who feel for the neceſſitous and diſtreſſed, and are ready to do what they can to relieve and comfort them; who are meek and lowly in heart, long ſuffering, and expreſs their affectionate good wiſhes for the whole houſhold of faith, and indeed for all their brethren of mankind, before the father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, of whom the whole family both in heaven and earth is named. Such the apoſtle John ſpeaks of as having paſſed from death to life; of ſuch he expreſly teſtifies that they dwell in GOD, and that GOD dwells in

them, and to ſuch, his Lord and theirs promiſed the kingdom of heaven. If you have theſe evidences of the chriſtian temper and character, you have an undoubted right to all the privileges of his kingdom upon earth, as well as a preparative for the inheritance of the ſaints in light.

I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

The ſame Subject continued.

EXAMINE yourſelf, my Philetus, whether you be in the faith. Have you, or have you not, the true temper of the children of GOD and the followers of Jeſus? I aſk you not, nor ought it to be matter of enquiry with you, when ſearching into the evidences of your meetneſs for chriſtian communion, whether you never ſay or do any thing in the leaſt inconſiſtent with the precepts of the goſpel. That perfection of grace is not to be expected on this ſide heaven; much leſs is it to be looked upon as an indiſpenſible preparative for the Lord's-ſupper. But are you in ſome meaſure, and from the heart, in ſubjection to the law of Chriſt? and do you deſire to be ſtill more ſo? Then read over the promiſes again which are made to ſuch in the word

word of God, and conclude (for then you may upon a ſufficient authority) that if theſe bleſſings are yours, you have a right, through the ſame grace that has entitled you to theſe, to the privilege of a place at the Redeemer's table. Nay, if he has done thus much for you and raiſed you to ſuch hopes, you ought immediately, conſtantly and affectionately to celebrate his love in thoſe memorials of that death of his by which you are brought hitherto. "Yes (you will ſay) and I would ap- "proach him in that ordinance, but "ſtill I am afraid, leſt, though I "ſhould have ſomewhat of the ſin- "cerity of the chriſtian temper, I "ſhould not be yet ſufficiently eſtab- "liſhed in the good ways of GOD. "The Chriſtian has many enemies; "he meets with many difficulties and "ſnares in the world, and I ſee this "and that profeſſor, that ſeemed to "begin in the ſpirit, making an awful "end in the fleſh; and I cannot but "diſtruſt my own heart, leſt I ſhould "be of that number. Perhaps, after having

" having given myſelf up to the Lord
" publickly at his table, ſome tempta-
" tion or other may prevail upon me
" to make ſhipwreck of faith, and a
" good conſcience. And how ſad will
" be the conſequence, both to me and
" my profeſſion, if I then turn aſide
" from GOD's holy commandments!
" Surely it will be better that I ſhould
" not vow, than vow and not pay."

And indeed ſo, in ſome reſpects it certainly would. But give me leave to remind you of two things here, which, if properly attended to, may in ſome meaſure remove the difficulty; or at leaſt convince you that there is not all that in it to diſcourage your approach to this ordinance that you may have imagined. The one is, that you will be in leſs danger of falling into ſin, when in communion with a chriſtian church, than out of it. I do not ſay you will be in no danger of it then. Never ſhall we get entirely out of the reach and influence of tempations to ſin, till we get to the church of GOD above. But thoſe who thus give themſelves

themſelves to the Lord, to honour him as the great head of the church, to enjoy his preſence, and to promote his intereſt, are therein making uſe of the means appointed and calculated to preſerve and promote their faith and purity. We commemorate a fact at the Lord's table that gives us a moſt alarming view of ſin. The ſon of GOD is there ſet forth as crucified before us, that he might do away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf. We may there ſee what an evil there is in ſin, which brought upon a perſon of his worth and dignity ſuch ſevere ſufferings; and learn from his enduring ſo much to deliver us from it, how inexcuſable we ſhould be in indulging it! Being redeemed from all iniquity by the precious blood of the ſon of GOD, a lamb without blemiſh and without ſpot, we reckon ourſelves to be dead indeed unto ſin; and under the ſtrongeſt obligations to live unto him who has ſo loved us as to give himſelf for us. We promiſe, over thoſe memorials of his dying love, that we will be the Lord's; and the chriſtian

chriſtian has thoſe tranſactions to recollect and plead in an hour of temptation: "How can I do this wickedneſs and ſin againſt GOD! I who have given myſelf up to GOD, and the Redeemer and have promiſed before men and angels that, whatever others do, and whatever ſnares or diſcouragements I may meet with, I will ſerve the Lord. Let it be my daily care that all who have ſeen my profeſſion may alſo ſee my good works, and learn from thence to glorify my father who is in heaven."

Moreover, every member of a chriſtian church has a peculiar claim to the prayers and affectionate notice, not only of his paſtor, but likewiſe of all who are in communion with him. They are bound to do all they can to ſtrengthen, ſtabliſh and ſettle you; to direct you when you are in difficulty; to comfort you when you are in diſtreſs; to give you a kind warning when they ſee you in danger of falling into ſin, and tenderly to put you in mind when they think you negligent of your duty;

as well as to confirm your holy reſolutions, and aſſiſt you in every good word and work.

And indeed this ordinance itſelf has (under GOD) a direct tendency to ſubſerve theſe great and important purpoſes: to improve the habitual reliſh of the ſoul for ſpiritual and divine exerciſes; to make the mortification of ſin more eaſy, and the practice of duty more delightful. Aſk the devout chriſtian communicant whether he has not often carried a ſtrong ſenſe of the evil of ſin, and a cordial delight in communion with GOD and devotedneſs to him, from the table of the Lord into his cloſet and family; and if he has not found the pleaſure and benefit of thoſe ſeaſons attending him through many ſucceeding days, and duties and trials. But in attending this ordinance we are not only making uſe of the appointed means of chriſtian eſtabliſhment and edification, and therefore are in leſs danger of falling into ſin than in the neglect of it, but I muſt remind you that we are there in the way of a divine

divine bleſſing. It would not indeed be right to think the bleſſing of God confined to ordinances. Thoſe whoſe afflictions keep them at home, or whoſe homes are too far from the ſanctuary to permit them to come up and worſhip, may hope for his bleſſing at a diſtance if they ſincerely deſire it. But thoſe who are able, and have opportunity, to go up to the houſe and table of the Lord, and will not, have no encouragement to expect it. Whereas they that wait on the Lord, it is ſaid, ſhall renew their ſtrength; they ſhall be as mount Sion that cannot be moved but abideth for ever. And of thoſe that are thus planted in the houſe of the Lord, it is aſſerted, that they ſhall flouriſh in the courts of our God; they ſhall bring forth fruit to old age. Theſe, and other ſimilar paſſages in the oracles of truth, give us reaſon to believe, that in keeping his commandments there is great reward.

And the great head of the chriſtian church, who gave it in charge to his

diſciples to do this, to eat of this bread and drink of this cup in remembrance of him, has promiſed that wherever two or three are met together in his name, he will be in the midſt of them and bleſs them. At his board then let us humbly wait upon him for his bleſſing, for the communication of his holy Spirit to fortify us againſt every temptation, to ſtrengthen and determine us for every duty, and to conduct us ſafe through the trials of life, and the dark valley of the ſhadow of death to the joys and honours of his right hand above.

But perhaps to what I have been ſaying you will reply, "That notwithſtanding all the advantages of chriſtian communion, ſome who have thus ſeparated themſelves from the world to be a peculiar people to the Lord, have been again entangled and overcome by temptations, and have not only fallen into ſin, but have likewiſe continued in it, for ought appeared, even to the end of their lives." This is indeed too evident

evident to be denied. But what is the moſt ſuitable improvement to be made of ſuch melancholy events as theſe? Would it become you to ſit down in diſcouragement and ſay, "If ſuch "and ſuch a profeſſor has not been "able to maintain his ground, it were "in vain for me to expect or attempt "it?" Rather ſay, "Has this and "that follower of Chriſt forſaken "him? have they, by an unbecom-"ing converſation, given offence to "his people, and an opportunity of "triumph and reproach to his ene-"mies? ſo much the more need is "there that others ſhould appear for "him, and exert themſelves with "more than common ardour when "ſome treacherouſly abandon his in-"tereſt, and rebel againſt him." Has a heart divided between Chriſt and the world, in this and that inſtance yielded to temptations, be you the more ſolicitous to be entirely the Lord's, and preſent ſoul and body, all you are and all you have, a reaſonable ſervice. Nor diſtruſt the riches of his

grace. He will not forſake the work of his hands; nor will he be unfaithful to forget your work and labour of love. Stir up yourſelf therefore, and others about you to this great duty of ſelf-dedication to the Lord at his table. You well know that the neglect of this ordinance cannot excuſe any one in an evil way. And I urge this as a farther conſideration to remove your diſcouragement. "What (ſay you) if I "ſhould fall into ſin after I have "been at the Lord's table?" Undoubtedly the more religion a perſon pretends to, the viler his hypocriſy is, if he has no real religion at all. Yet ſome think the guilt of the communicant's ſins to be more highly aggravated above thoſe of other perſons, than they ought to do; and ſeem to imagine that they will have very little to anſwer for who have not profaned the Lord's table. Certainly the iniquity of their ſin will be found, another day, to have been very great who have been guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

But

But let me aſk you who have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, what you think of the obligations of that holy ordinance? After having been waſhed with water in thoſe ſacred names, ought you not to be afraid of polluting yourſelf again with ſin? Does not that inſtitution of your divine Maſter remind you of the neceſſity of having the heart ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, and ſhew you that without holineſs no man can ſee the Lord? are you not taught to conſider yourſelf thereupon as under very ſolemn obligations to be dead indeed unto ſin; and told that, as Chriſt was raiſed from the dead in and for the glory of the Father, it becomes you henceforward to be walking with him in newneſs of life. Your friends gave you up to GOD in this ordinance with a profeſſed deſire that you might be intereſted in him and devoted to him; and would it not be publickly declaring your diſapprobation of that ſacred engagement, and ſaying that you will

not be his, if you ſhould ſerve divers luſts and pleaſures? is not every act of diſobedience, whether in or out of communion, a breach of thoſe vows of GOD that have been upon you from very early life? A violation of thoſe ſacred engagements, of the nature and extent of which you was long ſince informed, and have been often reminded, and which have been, at one time or other, very ſeriouſly preſſed upon you.

And beſides that, if you ſin, though you have never been at the Lord's table, you ſin againſt the knowledge of the truth, put into your hands and ſounded frequently in your ears.—You have been warned of the evil and danger of ſin, and of the beauty of holineſs. The path of duty has been pointed out and ſtrongly recommended to you. You have been inſtructed, admoniſhed, and encouraged to think of your ways and turn your feet unto GOD's teſtimonies. In a word, you will have to account for the ſame religious profeſſion, and all the privi-

leges

leges which your brethren in communion will be accountable for, except that one ordinance of the Lord's-ſupper.

Think of this when you are ready to imagine that you ſhall have very little to anſwer for if you have not been guilty of counteracting the engagements of the holy communion; and eſpecially when tempted from that conſideration either to take encouragement to walk leſs circumſpectly or to live in the neglect of this ordinance.

But ſtill you ſay, "He that doubteth is damned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of faith, and whatſoever is not of faith is ſin. And I have by no means that faith which is above a doubt, how then may I ſafely come to that table?" Let me aſk you, Of what kind are your doubts? do you doubt the lawfulneſs of eating bread, and drinking wine in remembrance of Jeſus Chriſt? If not, yours is not a caſe that in any view comes within the deſign of the Apoſtle in the paſſage referred to. No,

you

you ſay, but you have ſtill your doubts and fears concerning your intereſt in Chriſt, and your title to the privileges of his kingdom. But have you looked into the evidences of your title? have you examined yourſelf by the word of GOD whether you are in the faith? Yes, you ſay, I have, and I hope I can find ſomewhat of that love to GOD, and Chriſt and my chriſtian brethren that was before deſcribed: But ſtill I want to have fuller ſatisfaction. I want to be able to ſay without a doubt as David did in his laſt moments, "He hath made with me an "everlaſting covenant." And as Paul does, in his epiſtle to the Galatians, concerning his crucified Maſter, "He "loved me and gave himſelf for me." Undoubtedly thoſe are happy who can adopt that language upon ſolid and good grounds. But are you to wait for ſuch a degree of aſſurance before you come to the Lord's table? By no means. Thoſe who are weak in the faith the church is commanded to receive; and ſuch ſhould come to this ordi-

ordinance to be eſtabliſhed, ſtrengthened, and ſettled. It is appointed for ſuch purpoſes; and bleſſed be GOD, inſtances have not been wanting in which theſe valuable ends have been anſwered by a humble and dutiful attendance upon it. But an aſſurance of our intereſt in GOD, and title to heaven far from being the eſſence of faith, or a neceſſary preparative for this ordinance, is not uſually attained, or to be expected, on a ſolid foundation, but after a courſe of long walking with GOD. Nor has that paſſage (in Rom. xiv.) any reference either to ſuch an aſſurance, or to the ordinance of the Lord's ſupper. The Apoſtle is evidently ſpeaking there, of the chriſtians eating in their common meals that concerning which they were in doubt whether it was lawful food. Many who had been converted to chriſtianity from Paganiſm, and others who before had been zealouſly attached to the law of Moſes, ſcrupled the lawfulneſs of eating ſome particular kinds of meat. One believeth,

lieveth, ſays he (ver. 2.) that he may eat all things, another who is weak enough to retain the prejudices of his Pagan or Jewiſh education, and in conſequence thereof knows not whether he ſhould not offend GOD by eating this or that kind of fleſh, eateth herbs. For my own part I am perſuaded by what I have been informed of the will of our Lord Jeſus, whoſe authority alone I now regard in this matter, that nothing of this kind is in itſelf unclean, as our divine maſter never intended to make any diſtinctions of this ſort, between one kind of food and another. Nevertheleſs a perſon ought not to eat of that, whatever it be, that he thinks unclean or forbidden to him by the law of Chriſt. Therefore let no man do violence to his conſcience, or interrupt the peace of his mind, for the ſake of gratifying a carnal appetite: For, ſays our apoſtle, the perſon that doubteth the lawfulneſs of this or that kind of food, or (as the marginal reading is) diſcerneth, or makes a difference, between meats,

meats, and believes ſome are clean and proper to be eaten, and others not clean nor permitted for food, and yet, at the ſame time, heedleſsly eats every thing that falls in his way, ſuch a one is damned (or condemned) by his own conſcience and conduct, becauſe it is not of faith; he has not practically adhered to that diſtinction between meats which he believes he ought to do: and whatſoever, in this ſenſe, is not of faith (that is, whatſoever a man does inconſiſtent with his own principles) is ſin in him, though in itſelf indifferent, and in another perſon of different ſentiments, perfectly right and proper. Now if any uſe at all is to be made of this paſſage in the caſe before us, it is merely to apply it as a general caution againſt entering raſhly upon this or any tranſaction; and if it is ſtill a matter of doubt with you whether you ſhould be an accepted gueſt at this ſacred feaſt, endeavour to obtain ſatisfaction in the important enquiry by attending cloſe-

ly to the nature and design of the ordinance, and what is required in the word of GOD in order to your approaching him with acceptance and improvement in it. Adieu!

I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

The ſame Subject continued.

THOUGH you ſhould acknowledge that the paſſage in Rom. xiv. 8. has no immediate reference to the Lord's-ſupper, I know, my Philetus, you are often thinking of another ſtill more alarming, that undoubtedly has. That declaration of Paul, "He "that eateth and drinketh unworthi-"ly, eateth and drinketh damnation "to himſelf, not diſcerning the Lord's "body." To judge properly of the true meaning of theſe words, it will be neceſſary both to examine the nature of the crime ſpoken of, and the bad conſequence attending it.—And what was it, think you, that the Apoſtle meant by eating and drinking unworthily at the Lord's table? You will

underſtand it better, if you look back to ſome former paſſages in the epiſtle.

It appears (from Chap. i. 11. and Chap. vi. 1, 7, 8.) that there had been ſuch contentions among the chriſtians at Corinth, as had divided the church into many unhappy parties (ſee Chap. i. 12. iii. 3. xi. 18.) Some groſs immoralities had likewiſe crept in among them, and ſuch, as he ſays, were not ſo much as named among the Gentiles. (Chap. v. 1. and Chap. vii. 9, 11.) And yet, while thus ſunk in licentiouſneſs, they indulged (as is often the caſe) many ſuperſtitious ſcruples about ceremonies, and matters in themſelves indifferent. Yea they carried their proud, carnal, contentions and idolatrous diſpoſition with them into the church of GOD; ſo that when they came to this ordinance, which they were taught to conſider both as a token and confirmation of their union to Chriſt, and communion with each other, as fellow-heirs of the ſame grace, far from attending ſuitably to the practical ends of the inſtitution,

they

they did not ſo much as preſerve a decent form of adminiſtring and receiving it. When you come together, ſays Paul, into one place, it is not to eat the Lord's-ſupper; you loſe not only the true ſpirit, but even the proper form and appearances of that ſacred ſolemnity. For in eating, every one takes before the other his own ſupper, and thus one is hungry, and another, through his intemperance even at that table, is drunken.

Moſt of theſe Corinthian converts had been bred up in the ſuperſtitions of idolatry, and that at a time when Greece was abandoned to almoſt every vice. They had probably joined in many riotous banquetings at the feaſts of their deteſtable idols; and, though now convinced of the truth and importance of chriſtianity, could not forget their idolatrous cuſtoms; but mingled them, as the Jews did theirs, with the inſtitutions of the goſpel; not knowing, or not conſidering, that they were abſolutely incompatible with ſo pure, ſimple, and ſpiritual a diſpen-

ſation. Hence they introduced many licentious exceſſes at the Lord's table, which they had formerly indulged themſelves in, at (what they called, though improperly) their ſacred feſtival. Every one provided for himſelf, or procured for another, as he could or choſe; conſulted the gratification of his carnal appetite, with very little regard to the deſign of the ordinance, to his crucified maſter who inſtituted it, or his brethren in communion with him. Nay, in conſequence of this indecent and diſorderly conduct, the poor were overlooked and neglected, while thoſe who had plenty, eat and drank to exceſs. Which occaſioned that advice (ver. 33, 34.) My brethren when ye come together to eat, upon this ſacred occaſion, tarry one for another; and, if any hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together into condemnation. Otherwiſe he will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord; of proſtituting thoſe elements to very vile purpoſes, which were intended to be ſet apart and received, at this

this ſolemnity, as memorials of his body and blood—as not diſcerning the Lord's body, or making a due diſtinction between theſe repreſentations of that, and common meals, or even the unhallowed rites of a Pagan temple. This then was the crime which the apoſtle more immediately referred to in eating and drinking unworthily, approaching the ordinance in an irreverent manner, indulging pride and a party ſpirit at that holy table, as well as ſeeking the gratification of ſenſual appetite, while profeſſing to commemorate his death, who ſuffered on the croſs to redeem his people from all iniquity and to reconcile them in one body. If it be aſked, Can none eat and drink unworthily who do not attend upon the ordinance juſt in the manner and ſpirit of theſe Corinthians? I anſwer, many undoubtedly may; the infidel, the hypocrite and the ungodly, have neither part nor lot in this matter. Indeed there is a ſenſe in which all are unworthy of this and every other privilege of the goſpel; but

nothing is ſaid here, or in any other part of the ſacred ſcriptures, to diſcourage thoſe from approaching it, who come to it in a decent and orderly manner, from a principle of love and duty to the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and in humble dependance upon the mercy of GOD in him for acceptance herein. All ſuch have encouragement to hope, and are again and again bid welcome to all the bleſſings of the goſpel covenant.

"Nor, (as a judicious writer ob-"ſerves) is it ſaid in this paſſage, that "if he that is unworthy eats and "drinks at this table, but he that "does it unworthily, eats and drinks "judgment to himſelf;" Who otherwiſe might not be afraid to come? for who can ſay, I have made my heart clean? There is not a juſt man upon earth that does good and ſins not. But the ſincere, though imperfect, have abundant encouragement to draw nigh to GOD, in this as well as all the other ordinances of the goſpel, in hope of acceptance through Jeſus the medi-

mediator; "Otherwiſe (ſays one) it "would ſeem as though our Saviour "had inſtituted it as a kind of ſnare "to his people, to draw them into "danger of aggravated guilt." Far be it from any who call themſelves his diſciples to think ſo unworthily either of the ordinance itſelf or of him who inſtituted it.

Having enquired into the nature of the crime here ſpoken of, I will now endeavour to aſſiſt you in examining what the apoſtle ſays concerning the conſequence of eating and drinking unworthily, where that guilt is really incurred. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himſelf. It has been frequently obſerved that the paſſage would have conveyed the writer's meaning more exactly, if the original term (κριμα) had been tranſlated judgment, ſuch a one eateth and drinketh judgment to himſelf. But I muſt remark here, that it is not (as I have heard ſome quote the paſſage) judgment to his own ſoul. There is not

not only no mention of the ſoul, but nothing that refers to it. The judgment threatened is a temporal calamity, and eſpecially ſome bodily affliction. The word is often applied merely to what is endured in the preſent ſtate. One of the malefactors at our Lord's ſide, on the croſs, ſays to the other, upon his upbraiding Chriſt with his pretenſions to the kingdom of Iſrael, doſt not thou fear GOD, ſeeing thou art in the ſame condemnation? The word there tranſlated condemnation is the ſame that is here incautiouſly rendered damnation, and refers plainly to the ſufferings they were then enduring on the croſs. Paul ſays, they that reſiſt, or petulantly and rebelliouſly oppoſe, the powers that are ordained of GOD, ſhall receive to themſelves damnation: there it is tranſlated as here, though it plainly means nothing more than this, that ſuch will incur the puniſhment of the civil magiſtrate who is appointed to be a terror, not to good works, but to the evil. And, that nothing more was intended

tended in this paſſage than ſome bodily afflictions, is evident from the apoſtle's own illuſtration of the thought, and enlargement upon it, in the following verſes. For this cauſe, upon the account, or (as the original word ſignifies in ſome places only) by means of, theſe indulgences, many are weak and ſickly among you, and many are actually fallen aſleep in death, having brought diſorders upon them which, humanly ſpeaking, have haſtened their end. But when we are judged we are chaſtened of the Lord that we ſhould not be condemned with the world. And if we would judge ourſelves we ſhould not be even thus judged or puniſhed; if we ſhould look well to both the manner and views with which we engage in theſe ſacred tranſactions, we ſhould not ſuffer even theſe bodily chaſtiſements. But when you are viſited with them, do not haſtily conclude they are the tokens of divine vengeance, rather regard them as the diſcipline of a wiſe and faithful father, to bring you to repentance, that you may

may not perish in an evil way, and so fall with sinners into everlasting perdition.

And for what purpose can you now suppose this passage is inserted and preserved in the sacred canon? It ought undoubtedly to serve as a barrier to secure the ordinance of the Lord's supper from the intrusion of profane persons, and from all scandalous irregularities. But should it discourage the humble christian from approaching it, who loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity? Though the intemperate, the factious, the interested and carnal may justly dread the guilt of eating and drinking unworthily, the sincere followers of the Lamb are not only permitted and invited, but expressly commanded likewise, to do this in remembrance of him; and thus to shew forth his death, that the ordinance may be preserved in the church, till he comes a second time without sin unto salvation. He himself has enjoined it who instituted the ordinance, and whom we are taught to regard herein, both

as

as our Lord and our Saviour. Nor is it in any view an unreaſonable ſervice. Nay thoſe that have engaged in it, have found it a very delightful and uſeful ordinance; the means of ſtrengthening their faith in Chriſt Jeſus, and inflaming their ſouls with more ardent love both to himſelf and his heavenly Father. From hence they have derived ſtrength for the duties and for the trials of life. At that table they have had ſuch views of a dying Saviour, as have tended happily to crucify the world unto them and them to the world. But, ſeparate from the pleaſure and benefits which you may hope for in a ſerious and diligent performance of this duty, ſurely it ought to have ſome influence upon you to remember, that it is the command of a friend, a dying friend: of one whoſe memory ought to be dear to you. You acknowledge that you are apt to forget him, or to recollect him with too much coldneſs and indifference, amidſt the hurries, temptations, and cares of life. And I am perſuaded it would grieve

you to have the Saviour utterly forgotten in the world, or this ordinance entirely loſt in the church. But are you not giving his ſervants occaſion to aſk you, while you abſent yourſelf month after month, and one year after another from his table, where is your zeal for your crucified Redeemer and Lord? Where your concern for that his kingdom among men which he has founded in his own blood? Death is emptying one ſeat after another round the table of the Lord; and do you not wiſh to ſee theſe empty places filled up? O for the bleſſing of the Spirit! when ſhall it be poured as floods upon the dry ground, that one of the ſeed of GOD's ſervants may come and ſay, I am the Lord's; and another of their offspring call himſelf by the name of Jacob; and another ſubſcribe with his hand to the Lord, and ſurname himſelf by the name of Iſrael: that the glory of thoſe happy days might be renewed in which believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Whether ſhall I

ſay

ſay that in many inſtances the cauſe of vital practical godlineſs ſuffers through the neglect of this ordinance, or that this table is ſhamefully neglected for want of a more powerful ſenſe of religion on the mind? Perhaps both are true. Certainly an indifference to one duty tends to the neglect of another. It would ſeem nothing ſtrange (though indeed moſt unhappy) if the chriſtian that, after having been often reminded of the nature of this ordinance, can perſiſt in the neglect of it; ſhould ſink into a wretched indifference to all the ordinances of the houſe of GOD, and all the religious duties likewiſe of his own. But where will the end of theſe things be? How ſad the conſequences both to individuals and the church of Chriſt! It were trifling to ſay GOD can preſerve his own cauſe without me. True he can. But does it owe you any thanks if you neglect the proper means of eſtabliſhing and advancing it? or where has he encouraged you to expect it then? It is much to be feared, that with ſuch who can

talk in that manner, and urge excuſes like theſe for their inactivity in the good ways of GOD, it is almoſt a matter of indifference whether the cauſe of Chriſt flouriſh or decay, whether it be preſerved or loſt; and while they continue of that ſpirit, little aſſiſtance is to be expected from them in the good work of building up GOD's Zion. I hope you, my Philetus, will never be tempted to excuſe your neglect of this ordinance by ſaying, You may get ſafe to heaven though you ſhould never partake of it. If one and another who do urge this would ſpeak out, they would ſay farther, "If "we have but religion enough to "carry us beyond the gates of hell, "we ſhall be contented. True, the "thought of periſhing at laſt ſhocks "us: we could not be eaſy if we ap-"prehended ourſelves in danger of "that: but yet we are not inclined "to give ourſelves much trouble a-"bout religion, nor are we willing "to lay ourſelves under obligations to "any peculiar ſelf-denial or ſuffering."

And

And is this the temper of a diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt? He has freely and frequently declared ſuch a one unworthy a name and place among his people. Far be it therefore from his ſervants to invite any of ſuch a ſpirit to this holy ordinance. But I have known ſome that have made light of it upon a ſomewhat different principle. "It cannot ſave us," ſay they, "and if we "are found in Chriſt we ſhall be ſav-"ed without it: we are juſtified not "by works, but by faith." And what is to be inferred from hence? "Were it not indecent and ungrateful not to comply with the Redeemer's will, becauſe our ſalvation is ſecured by his blood?" Or ſhall we ſay that we may go to heaven if we never pray, nor read the ſcriptures, nor attend upon any of the ordinances of the goſpel? If this principle will ſatisfy in the neglect of one duty, I know not why it may not in the neglect of all. But ſuch would do well to conſider what that faith is, by which we are juſtified. It is not a mere lifeleſs aſſent to

the truths of the goſpel, without correſpondent effects in the heart and life; that, the apoſtle James calls dead, in oppoſition to that living and powerful principle which works by love, and produces obedience to the commandments of GOD. Thoſe, and thoſe alone, Jeſus encourages to look upon themſelves as his friends who do whatſoever he has commanded them.—Well, but you will ſay perhaps, "Are "there not many of whom we have "reaſon to hope that they are good "chriſtians who never come to the "Lord's table?" It is much to be lamented that there ſhould be ſo many as there are. And I cannot but be peculiarly grieved to obſerve ſome who have perſiſted in the neglect of this duty till gray hairs are upon them. Such are doubtleſs great diſcouragements to the riſing generation, and are ſtrangely blind both to their duty and their intereſt. I heartily wiſh they may be convinced of their ſin and folly before their Lord comes, and that they may be then found walking in this

this and all his ſtatutes and ordinances blameleſs.—I am perſuaded they will need the enlivening influence of theſe means of grace to carry them through the few remaining days of their pilgrimage with comfort and honour. But if they or any others miſtake their intereſt and neglect their duty, do you rather obey your Lord's command than imitate their example. Poſſibly ſome around you ſecretly make your neglect their excuſe. "Ah," but you ſay, "they have not ſo much reaſon "for their neglect as I have." And, it may be, they ſay or think the ſame of you; at leaſt each heart knows moſt of its own weakneſſes and diſcouragements. And conſidering the influence of example, and how many are ready to indulge themſelves in a careleſs trifling ſpirit when they ſee others indulge it, every one that has any regard to the intereſt of Chriſtianity, and the good of ſouls, ſhould take care that there be nothing in his walk to encourage it. Nay, give me leave to remind you, that every one who loves the Lord

Jeſus Chriſt, and wiſhes to ſee the proſperity of his church ſhould exert himſelf with more than common ardour and activity in his ſervice when he ſees others trifling and inconſtant in it, inſtead of making their deficiencies an excuſe for his own.

Permit me then to aſk you in few words; Are you in good earneſt for GOD and heaven? do you deſire to be ſteady, conſiſtent, and exemplary in your religious profeſſion? Would you, as the chriſtian pilgrim, keep the end of your journey in view, and every day be advancing towards the heavenly Canaan? is it your deſire to walk with GOD, and to live a life of faith in his dear Son? would you attain to the grand end of your chriſtian profeſſion, and ſo apprehend that for which you are alſo apprehended of Chriſt Jeſus? Or, after all, will you be a mere trifler in religion; and ſatisfy yourſelf in the neglect of many of its moſt important duties and privileges? Will you act as though you thought the Redeemer's yoke uneaſy, and his burden

burden intolerable? could you be content with the loweſt attainments in the divine life, and to appear in good earneſt in every thing but the moſt momentous concerns of the ſoul and eternity? Shall men conclude that you are afraid or aſhamed to appear in your Lord's cauſe? or that it is a matter of indifference with you whether this ordinance of his is continued or loſt in the churches? Preſs inquiries like theſe with all ſerioufneſs upon your conſciences as in the ſight of GOD; and do it immediately. The matter is too important to admit either of ſuſpence or delay. Say not, it is time enough for me to come to that ordinance ſome years hence: "Thou knoweſt not "what may be on the morrow; what "is thy life? it is even as a vapour "that appears for a little while, and "then vaniſhes away." But is not the ſervice of Chriſt important and delightful enough to deſerve your beſt days? or is it too ſoon to give yourſelf up entirely to him? Shall you think ſo upon a dying bed, either in youth

or

or in age? Will it not be pleaſant to you in old age, if you ſhould be ſpared to it, after having devoted yourſelf early to GOD, to recollect that gracious word of his, I remember the kindneſs of thy youth? Will not ſeaſons of communion with him now, think you, afford pleaſing matter of recollection then? You will certainly need ſomewhat both to ſupport and quicken you when heart and fleſh fails. Nay I cannot but think you muſt find the want of ſuch means of grace now: though you have not been long in the world, you have known ſome of its cares and hurries. "Yes," you will ſay, "and "that is the reaſon that I have no "more time to think of this ordi-"nance:" But is it a juſt reaſon for neglecting it? If your buſineſs makes it impoſſible for you to pay the attention to this and other divine inſtitutions which they deſerve, ſurely you have either too much, or do not manage it with prudence. It were indeed a miſtake to imagine that you muſt be ſlothful in buſineſs in order to be

be fervent in ſpirit ſerving the Lord. A good man ſhould be active for both worlds. Yet the more you find of the undue influence of things ſeen and temporal, the more diligently you ought to apply to thoſe means, in the uſe of which you may hope, with his bleſſing who has appointed them for ſuch purpoſes, to have the world crucified to you, and to be yourſelf more entirely crucified to the world. If you continue to neglect them it will be no wonder if the world, in a little while, ſhould run away with all your time, and your heart too. Beſides, let me intreat you to conſider ſeriouſly how much the intereſt of Chriſt needs the countenance and active ſervices of the riſing generation. "The ways of "Zion mourn (ſays a ſerious writer) "becauſe few come up to her ſolemn "feaſt: and no wonder if the Papiſt, "the Deiſt, and the Libertine prevail "to the ſpeedy decay of true godli-"neſs when Proteſtants, and eſpeci-"ally when many called proteſtant "Diſſenters ſlight that holy commu-

"nion

"nion and diſcipline which was the "glory of our land in the times of "real reformation." O let not any in younger life learn indifference to divine ordinances from you; nor do you any longer neglect to appear in the Redeemer's cauſe at a time of life when you are ſo capable of ſerving it. "It "is not more unreaſonable," ſays the writer juſt referred to, "for a perſon "to talk of being the true born and "faithful ſubject of an earthly prince, "and claim his privileges; while he "refuſes his oath of allegiance, and "other teſtimonies of his loyalty, than "it is for a man to pretend to be a "ſubject of grace, and to belong to "Chriſt, when at the ſame time he "will not openly confeſs him and "keep his commandments. I would "not (ſays he in another place) lay "too great a ſtreſs on ordinances, but "I am perſuaded that a conſcientious "conformity to goſpel inſtitutions will "be found of greater conſequence at "the judgment ſeat than ſeems ge-"nerally thought by the hearers of

"the

" the preſent day; and I am likewiſe
" free to declare, that I know of no
" reaſon for hoping to be ſaved by
" Chriſt, but is a reaſon for fellow-
" ſhip with his people." And I muſt beg leave to be as free in obſerving farther, that if there be any thing really offenſive or diſcouraging to you, or to any that love the Lord Jeſus in ſincerity, in the diſcipline of a church with which you could be glad to unite in chriſtian communion, ſuch a ſociety would do well to conſult and purſue every proper method for removing ſuch ſtumbling blocks out of the way. Much as there is amiſs in the conſtitution of thoſe churches that admit indiſcriminately all who offer themſelves to communion, it is likewiſe to be lamented that others are impoſing terms of admiſſion for which they have neither precept nor example in the word of GOD. It ſeems highly proper that every candidate for communion with a chriſtian church ſhould give that church credentials of his being a chriſtian. But as neither Chriſt nor his

his apoſtles have determined in what particular way that ſatisfaction ſhould be given, both miniſter and people ought to be very cautious that they do not, by any unſcriptural rigour, keep thoſe at a diſtance from the privileges of the church here, who are dear to their common Lord now, and will be diſtinguiſhed by tokens of his ſpecial favour another day.—But after all, my Philetus, you may, perhaps, think theſe difficulties greater than they really are. Poſſibly thoſe who, you apprehend, would oppoſe your admiſſion into communion are ſecretly wiſhing for it, and would be glad to promote it. However it is your duty to make the trial, and if you are refuſed, they, and not you, will be anſwerable for the omiſſion. Though the leaſt oppoſition might greatly diſtreſs and diſcourage you, yet you would have this for your rejoicing, the teſtimony of your conſcience, that you ſought an opportunity of doing your Lord's will. But I would hope that few, of a truly religious ſpirit and character, would in any

any church meet with oppoſition in an attempt of this ſort, unleſs by here and there a perſon whoſe bigotry and uncharitableneſs ought by all means, in ſuch a caſe, to be over-ruled by the united voices of miniſters and ſuch chriſtians as deſire to act upon the maxim recommended by the apoſtle Paul, who has commanded us to receive even him that is weak in the faith, but not to doubtful diſputation.

Adieu, my Philetus,

And believe me to be, &c.

LETTER XIII.

On the Duties of Communicants.

I Rejoice greatly to find, my Philetus, that you have been prevailed upon to give yourſelf up to the church of Chriſt according to his will. I doubt not but, under a divine bleſſing, you will find the comfort and benefit of chriſtian communion. But ſuffer the word of exhortation. Having vowed a vow unto the Lord, defer not to pay it. Walk ſteadily with the chriſtian ſociety with which you are united by very tender and ſolemn ties, in chriſtian doctrine and fellowſhip, in breaking of bread and in prayers. Know them that labour for your chriſtian edification, and are over you in the Lord, and admoniſh you; and eſteem them very highly in love for their

their work's ſake. Pray for them. Contribute chearfully to their ſupport. Be a follower of them as far as they are followers of Chriſt. Attend diligently upon their adminiſtrations. Obey them and ſubmit yourſelf; for they watch for your ſoul as thoſe that muſt give an account. Sympathiſe tenderly with them under all the trials they endure, whether as men, as chriſtians, or as miniſters; and do your utmoſt in your ſtation, to lighten the weight of thoſe labours and diſcouragements which are inſeparably connected with a faithful diſcharge of the many arduous and important duties of their office.

Walk in love likewiſe towards your chriſtian brethren. Pray for them, Converſe freely with them on the great things of vital practical religion. Exerciſe forbearance and long-ſuffering towards your fellow chriſtians, as one that has learnt of Jeſus to be meek and lowly of heart. Always ſtudy thoſe things that make for peace, and that tend to promote candour and

charity. Be particularly tender of young ones; and ſhew compaſſion to the weak and afflicted. We muſt bear one another's burdens if we would fulfil the law of Chriſt. And let me intreat you likewiſe to uſe hoſpitality without grudging; doing good to all as you have opportunity, but eſpecially to thoſe who are of the houſhold of faith. Take pains to ſerve the intereſt of Chriſt in general, and pay a peculiar attention to the ſociety to which you belong. Pray for its continued peace and proſperity, and do your utmoſt to promote the purity of the chriſtian faith, and the power of godlineſs around you. Mark ſuch as cauſe diviſions and offences, and ſuch as make ſhipwreck of faith and a good conſcience; and every one that is overtaken in a fault, endeavour to reſtore with the ſpirit of meekneſs, conſidering thyſelf, leſt thou alſo be tempted. By your example and converſation provoke to love and to good works.

And

And as you would walk worthy of the Lord, unto all well pleasing, attend steadily and conscientiously to the duties of every relation in life in which providence has placed you. They that would appear with honour and advantage in the house of GOD, must carry their religion with them into their own houses: and indeed into all their transactions with their fellow creatures. Let me therefore entreat you to walk circumspectly, with honour, with prudence, and strict virtue, to those that are without. Remember your profession at all times, in all places, and in all company. Others will not forget it though you do. Discountenance, not only profaneness and impurity, both in conduct and conversation, but likewise all unbecoming levities, and every appearance of evil, as much as possible by your example and influence. And on the other hand encourage the hearts, and strengthen the hands of sincere, humble christians of every denomination. Recommend and manifest a truly catholick disposi-

tion to ſuch as may differ from you in ſome leſſer peculiarities of ſentiment, or modes of worſhip; wiſhing, in the true ſpirit of the goſpel, grace and peace to all that love the Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity. Never ſo much as wiſh to lord it over other men's faith and conſciences. Be thankful for the religious liberty you enjoy; thankful to GOD Almighty, and thankful to thoſe who, under GOD, are the guardians of it, and ſubmit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's ſake. By all means guard againſt every abuſe of liberty yourſelf, and do your utmoſt to diſcountenance all licentiouſneſs both in principle and practice, as that which tends to the ruin of a people. In a word, whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honourable, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praiſe, think on theſe things, and diligently practiſe them: So will you be an honour to your

your religious profeſſion, and a credit and a bleſſing to the ſociety with which you are more immediately connected. You will herein likewiſe have this for your rejoicing, the teſtimony of your conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity, not with fleſhly wiſdom, but by the grace of GOD you have your converſation in the world, and towards the church. And I doubt not but you, and all the faithful followers of Jeſus, will alſo find, according to his word, that in keeping his commandments there is great reward. And after a long ſeries of ſervices upon earth, may you have an abundant entrance adminiſtered to you into your great maſter's joy!

So prays, &c.

LET-

LETTER XIV.

On Baptiſm.

I Congratulate you, Philetus, on the deliverance which a good GOD has lately granted to the dear companion of your life, and the addition he has made to her joys and your own in the child he has graciouſly given you. May you be long happy in one another and in your offspring, and be enabled to make the proper acknowledgment and improvement of this and every other mercy! You will, I truſt, conſider this gracious and ſeaſonable appearance of divine providence as an additional obligation to yield yourſelf unto GOD, and employ every talent with encreaſing diligence, in his ſervice. And, being the Lord's yourſelf, you

you cannot but be desirous that your little one may be his likewise.

Take the first opportunity of presenting it to God, and of asking for it, in the name of Jesus, the blessings of his covenant. The infant seed of his people were, by his appointment, in very early ages of the church, taken into covenant with God together with their parents. You may look back with great pleasure in this view upon such promises as that which he made to his servant Noah, "I will establish "my covenant with you and with "your seed after you." And that to Abraham, "I will establish my cove-"nant between me and thee, and thy "seed after thee in their generations, "for an everlasting covenant, to be a "God to thee, and to thy seed after "thee." He ordered circumcision as an external token of this his covenant-favour. "Every man-child among you "shall be circumcised, and it shall be "a token of the covenant between me "and thee."

The

The privileges of this covenant were indeed more immediately appropriated to the ſeed of Abraham. But it appears, both from ſacred and uninſpired writers, that proſelytes from heathenism, upon ſubmitting to this rite, and being baptized, were admitted to a part with them, if they brought the ſacrifices appointed. The cuſtom of baptizing theſe proſelytes continued in the church untill the time of our Saviour. And as thoſe of their children that were born before the converſion of their parents were baptized with them, the apoſtles would very naturally conclude that their divine maſter meant to include them in his commiſſion to diſciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy-Ghoſt. And the rather, as they had ſeen him receiving little children with the utmoſt tenderneſs and affection; like the good ſhepherd gathering theſe lambs in his arms, and carrying them in his boſom; and had heard him recommending to his followers the like condeſcenſion and good-

good will towards them. If they had been commanded to circumcise all nations, there can be no doubt but they would have circumcised children, because they had been usually admitted to that rite before; and why not baptize them for the same reason? There could be no impropriety in applying this seal or token of GOD's covenant to children, as that which Paul calls a seal of the righteousness of faith, had been applied to them by divine appointment ever since the days of Abraham; especially as baptism is, according to Paul's representation of it in his epistle to the christians at Colosse, (chap. ii. ver. 11, 12.) the circumcision of Christ, or the christian circumcision. The covenant of GOD with believers has been the same in all ages; and we have surely good reason to hope that he will be a GOD to them and to their seed, in as extensive a sense now as he was before the establishment of christianity. Indeed Peter expressly assured the christian converts in his day, that the promise was

to

to them and to their children. While they continued in infidelity themſelves, their children were unclean, and could not be admitted to an ordinance which neceſſarily ſuppoſes that thoſe parents are chriſtians themſelves who dedicate their children to GOD in it. Yet, upon their converſion, their children were holy, ſo far as to have a right to that ordinance by which they were introduced among the followers of the holy Jeſus. This ſeems the moſt natural interpretation of thoſe words of Paul 1 Cor. vii. 14. His reaſoning is to the ſame purpoſe in Rom. xi. 16. If the root be holy ſo are the branches. And the apoſtles firſt appointed to adminiſter the ordinances of the goſpel, ſeem to have acted upon this maxim in baptizing whole houſholds, in which it is the more probable that the children were included, as no mention is made of their baptizing adult perſons, whoſe parents were chriſtians, in all the New Teſtament, though it contains the hiſtory of about threeſcore years after the time of our Saviour.

Hence

Hence I truſt you will think it highly reaſonable and becoming to dedicate your child to the Lord in the ordinance of baptiſm; and the rather as you cannot but be ſenſible that ſuch a ſolemn tranſaction may and ought to be improved to very valuable purpoſes. For though it avail not to the putting away the filth of the fleſh, or the renovation of the heart, it may tend I hope to animate your prayers to GOD for your offspring, that you have thus committed and conſecrated it to him, and engage you to leave it chearfully with him, and to the wiſe diſpoſals of his providence. You hereby likewiſe lay yourſelf under very ſolemn obligations to train it up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord: And not only may, but ought, to improve the remembrance of this religious tranſaction as an argument with your offspring, in future years, to walk in newneſs of life, and to confirm their baptiſmal engagements by devoting themſelves faithfully and entirely to the Lord; having been thus given up to him in

early life by thoſe who were moſt affectionately concerned for their ſpiritual and eternal good.

The uſe of water in this ordinance, compared with ſeveral repreſentations of its nature and deſign in the word of GOD, naturally leads us to conſider it as an emblem and memento of that internal and ſpiritual purity which is eſſential to the chriſtian character. For my part, I lay no great ſtreſs upon the mode in which it is adminiſtred, becauſe I apprehend that the great head of the chriſtian church never intended that his diſciples ſhould. Yet I cannot but prefer the manner of applying water to the ſubject by ſprinkling or pouring. If ever the immerſion of the whole body was uſed in the eaſt, it would, in many circumſtances, be burdenſome and hazardous both to ſubjects and miniſters in theſe northern climates; nay, according to the ſenſe and uſage of our country and times, it appears rather an indecency. And we well know that Jeſus himſelf always preſerved the ſtricteſt decorum, made

made candid conceſſions, in matters of indifference, to the cuſtoms of the people among whom he lived; and always diſcovered and recommended the tendereſt regard to the lives and health of all men.

I mention theſe as reaſons for our diſpenſing with the immerſion of the body, ſuppoſing that to have been the prevailing cuſtom in Judea, in the firſt ages of chriſtianity. But many things urged to prove the antiquity and divine authority of that mode of baptizing appear to me utterly inconcluſive. There is no more reaſon for ſuppoſing that the Eunuch (for inſtance) went with Philip *into* the water, than that our Saviour went *into* the mountain that he might from thence teach the multitude. The word is (εις) the ſame in both places. There and in many other paſſages nothing more could be meant by it than *unto*. As when our Lord ſays (Mat. xv. 24.) I am not ſent but (εις) *unto* the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael; and (chap. xvii. 17.) bring him hither to

me (εις) &c. &c. But ſtill more defective is the proof from thence of the Eunuch's being immerſed in it. They were obliged to go down to the water ſide that he might be baptized by ſprinkling or pouring water upon him, unleſs they had been provided with a proper veſſel for bringing up the water from the river; and their return from the river ſide is naturally enough expreſſed by ſaying they came up from the water. It is ſaid indeed (Mat. iii 6.) that many were baptized by John (εν) in Jordan. But muſt we conclude from thence that they were immerſed in it? Within a few verſes of that Jeſus ſpeaks of baptizing (εν) *with* the Holy Ghoſt and *with* fire—ſo we tranſlate it; and ſhould never think of rendering it *in* the Holy Ghoſt and *in* fire, though the greek particle is the ſame in both places. Beſides, more were baptized by the Apoſtles in a day than I ſhould think, could have been baptized in that time by immerſion; and many more than we can ſuppoſe provided with change of

of raiment: and it is highly incredible that they ſhould immerſe them naked, eſpecially as the multitudes of theſe firſt converts conſiſted, it is expreſsly ſaid, both of men and women. It is highly probable that the Jaylor and his family were baptized in his houſe by night, where it is not to be thought that he had any place convenient for dipping. Indeed there ſeems to be frequent alluſions, in the ſacred ſcriptures, to the cuſtom of ſprinkling or pouring of water in baptiſm; particularly in that expreſſion of Jeſus which I mentioned before, "baptizing with the Holy Ghoſt and with fire;" and that in the epiſtle to the Hebrews, (chap. x. 22.) in which chriſtians are ſpoken of as having the heart ſprinkled from an evil conſcience, viz. by thoſe influences of GOD's holy Spirit, of which water, thus uſed in baptiſm, is a ſtriking emblem. This Spirit is expreſsly promiſed as one of the great bleſſings of the Goſpel covenant in the ſame terms. He (i. e. the Meſſiah) ſhall ſprinkle many nations; and again,

I will ſprinkle clean water upon you and ye ſhall be clean. It is very certain that thoſe Jewiſh waſhings were uſually performed by ſprinkling which the writer to the Hebrews calls baptiſms. Hence the ſeventy-two greek tranſlators of the Old Teſtament render that paſſage in which the deſcent of the dew upon Nebuchadnezzar is ſpoken of, "he was baptized (it is in our verſion he was wet) with the dew of heaven." Thus the Iſraelites were baptized in the cloud and in the ſea, when the former diſtilled drops of rain upon them, and the waves of the latter, agitated by the winds, ſprinkled them in their paſſage through it. And indeed the common expreſſion of baptizing with water more naturally leads us to think of applying water to the body than the body to the water. But it is not my deſign to recite all the ſeveral arguments that have been urged in vindication of infant-baptiſm, or this mode of adminiſtring it. Much time has been ſpent in the controverſy that might have been employed to far

far better purpoſes, and on ſubjects of much greater importance to the intereſt of religion, and the chriſtian cauſe. Let your great concern be to approve yourſelf to GOD and your own conſcience; and from a principle of love and ſubjection to the ſupreme head of the chriſtian church, and the tendereſt and moſt faithful concern for your dear little one, take the firſt opportunity to commit it to the ſpecial care of an indulgent providence, and the renewing influences of divine grace; deſirous, above all things, that it may be intereſted in Chriſt and devoted to him; that it may be his now, and his for ever. You will, I hope, likewiſe remember the obligations you are under, having thus given it up to the Lord, to watch over it with tenderneſs and care, to inſtruct it as ſoon as it appears capable of inſtruction, in the things that concern its uſefulneſs here and happineſs hereafter. Give line upon line, and precept upon precept; and inforce every recommendation of virtue and piety by a ſteady adhe-

rence to the rules of both in your own converſation and behaviour.

Give me leave to recommend to your frequent and attentive peruſal the Sermons of the late pious and learned Dr. Doddridge on the religious education of children, which contain many ſerious and pertinent advices upon this head. I wiſh you may always feel the weight of thoſe arguments by which the excellent author has urged upon parents the ſeveral important duties of a religious education, and have wiſdom and reſolution to perform them. You may reaſonably hope to find your own account in ſuch a pious care of your offspring, and will be therein performing a ſervice greatly needed, and of the utmoſt importance both to the riſing generation and to the church of Chriſt.

I am, &c.

LET-

LETTER XV.

On Family Religion.

IT is a truſt, my Philetus, of very great importance which is committed to you as the head of a family. You have therein the care of ſouls; of ſouls intended for immortality. Look upon your domeſticks as a charge with which your GOD and theirs has intruſted you, that you may be an inſtrument of forming them for uſefulneſs here, and everlaſting happineſs hereafter; and watch, I intreat you, for their ſouls as one that muſt give an account. Begin early with your tender offspring, and uſe all poſſible freedom and plainneſs in inſtructing them in the great things that concern their eternal ſalvation. Inculcate upon them a holy reverence of the word of GOD,

GOD, and endeavour to make them familiarly acquainted with it. Talk over its great truths, and the facts recorded in it, freely and tenderly with them; and ſpare no pains to render divine knowledge deſirable and delightful to them. Remember they will need line upon line, and precept upon precept. Indulge and direct their inquiries, and convince them that your great end, in all your inſtructions, is to make them wiſe to ſalvation. Cheriſh every proper impreſſion, and encourage what you ſee amiable in their temper and behaviour; but fail not to correct the firſt appearances of evil with a becoming mixture of reſolution and tenderneſs. Endeavour, in the whole of your behaviour towards all your domeſticks, to guard againſt the hurtful and dangerous extremes of ſeverity and indulgence. While you preſerve your authority with ſteadineſs, let them ſee that every injunction and reſtraint that you lay upon them is intended for their good, both in this world and another. Put ſome ſhort

and

and plain catechiſm early into the hands of your children, and more comprehenſive ſyſtems as their memories and underſtandings ſtrengthen. But rather allure than drive to theſe exerciſes, and when you call them to an account of what they have learnt, (which ſhould be at leaſt once or twice a week) make it rather an amuſement than a taſk. Engage the conſtant and ſerious attendance of all under your roof upon the publick ordinances of GOD's houſe, and be often recommending a conſcientious regard to all the inſtitutions of religion. I hope I need not caution you againſt thoſe levities in converſation upon religious ſubjects, before young perſons, which tend to make them think lightly of religion in general. Employ part of your Lord's-day evenings in talking over, with your family, what you and they have been hearing and engaging in. Aſſiſt them in recollecting the leading thoughts of the diſcourſes which you have attended upon, and aſk them what they can remember

of

of them themſelves. This will engage their attention, and ſtrengthen their memories, and will enable them to hear with growing diſcernment and advantage. And I cannot but think that you will find your own account in it likewiſe. Take each of them with you, at times, into your retirement, and there talk plainly and tenderly with them, and pray freely and affectionately for them. Exhort and encourage them to pray daily for themſelves. Call your family together, morning and evening, to attend upon the reading of the holy ſcriptures, and to join in ſocial exerciſes of devotion.

Indeed it will in a great meaſure depend upon you, my Philetus, whether your domeſtics ſhould devoutly acknowledge the father of their mercies together, or live without GOD in the world. I ſhould imagine you muſt be uneaſy to think of their ruſhing day after day, into the cares and temptations of life, without acknowledging, in the morning the mercies of the night,

night, and imploring the divine protection and bleſſing for the day; or that they ſhould retire to reſt one evening after another without any expreſſions of devout thankfulneſs to the God in whom they live, and move and have their being; without any confeſſion of their ſins, or petitions for future favour. And yet is not this frequently, nay is it not generally the caſe? If it is, let me freely tell you that you are chargeable with this their neglect of God, and the duty that they owe him together. They are under your direction, and providence has committed them to your immediate and conſtant care. I pray God that neither you nor yours may feel the vengeance with which the families are threatened that call not upon his name. This I know you would dread upon their account as well as your own. I know you maintain intercourſe with God yourſelf in private; and why ſhould you not reſolve with pious Joſhua, "As for me and "my houſe we will ſerve the Lord."

You cannot but think this a reaſonable and becoming ſervice; a ſervice that GOD requires, and that the daily circumſtances of your family render highly proper and expedient. Why then is it neglected? Not becauſe you are utterly regardleſs of your duty, or of the ſouls of your domeſtics. You ſecretly wiſh to have it introduced into your family, and kept up there; but you have either neglected it ſo long, or apprehend you ſhould perform it ſo imperfectly, that you know not when or how to ſet about it. But yet after all, if you were thoroughly ſenſible that you ought to engage in it, and could believe that you ſhould be able to perform it as it ought to be performed, I would hope that you could not neglect it. "But you think "yourſelf unfit to engage in it, and "that you cannot perform it in an ac- "ceptable and uſeful manner; and "too haſtily conclude from hence "that GOD does not expect it from "you, nay that it would be folly and "preſumption in you to undertake it."

Let

Let me intreat you to examine the force of the objection and difficulty in all its extent, as it affects the honour of GOD and the intereſt of religion; as well as your own ſpiritual welfare, and that of the family, over which providence has placed you.

Undoubtedly the credit and advancement of practical godlineſs ought to be dear to every one who makes a religious profeſſion. And though perhaps ſome, who have ruſhed into ſacred employments from private life, with weak capacities and little or no education, have given occaſion to thoſe who ſeek occaſion to treat the goſpel itſelf, as well as the chriſtian miniſtry, with contempt; yet you, my Philetus, have not the leaſt reaſon to be apprehenſive of any ill conſequences of that ſort from a faithful diſcharge of the religious duties of your family. Many chriſtians may pray daily with their families, with advantage to themſelves and thoſe who join with them, who would be unfit to engage in the more public and extenſive duties of the

chriſtian miniſtry. You are there, in a manner, ſpeaking in private, with only a few domeſtics around you, with whom you are intimately converſant every day, and over whom you have a great degree of authority. Should any be diſpoſed, contrary to all the natural obligations of their relation to the family with which they are connected, and in a manner inconſiſtent with that reſpect which they owe to the head of it; ſhould any, I ſay, be diſpoſed to ſpeak of you and your religious ſervices among them with an unbecoming freedom out of your family, they and not you would incur contempt. At leaſt it may afford you ſatisfaction to think that you have diſcharged your duty both to GOD and to them.

But I truſt a ſenſe of the divine preſence, and of the ſolemnity and importance of the duty, as well as a tender regard for the credit of your religious profeſſion, and the ſpiritual improvement of thoſe around you, will ſecure you from every thing that would be

be a juſt occaſion either of offence or ridicule. And when your mind is diſcouraged by an apprehenſion of this ſort you would do well to conſider ſeriouſly whether the intereſt of Chriſt and vital religion would not ſuffer a much greater diſcredit and diſadvantage by your neglecting family-prayer, than by ſome little imperfections and inaccuracies in the diſcharge of it. Which can you ſuppoſe would injure you moſt in the eſteem of your fellow chriſtians in other families, or even in the opinion of your own domeſtics? Muſt it not be a very diſcouraging diſappointment to a youth, who from his infancy has been called to bow the knee daily before GOD with his parents, when he comes into a prayerleſs family, and ſees thoſe ſpending week after week, and one month after another, without any united acknowledgement of the great father of their being and of their mercies, who nevertheleſs call themſelves chriſtians, and attend with diligence and decency upon the more publick inſtitutions of

the goſpel? What muſt they and what muſt others that hear of it think of all your pretenſions to godlineſs and the ſpirit of devotion, if you diſcover ſo little of it at home? May not ſome from hence be almoſt tempted to think lightly of communion with GOD itſelf when they find you take no more pains to maintain it in your own ſouls, and do ſo little to recommend it to others? Some, it may be, will conclude from thence that the whole of religion conſiſts in a few external forms of devotion in the ſanctuary once a week. And if you look forward, as you juſtly may and ought, to what will probably be the conſequences of that in the next age, and think how many, yet unborn, may feel the fatal effects of this indevout ſpirit; if you conſider how many families you may be the firſt occaſion of encouraging to live without GOD and without prayer, muſt you not feel the awakening conſideration? Ought it not to excite you, for the ſake of thoſe that are to learn of you how they ſhould walk and pleaſe GOD,

God, to take heed that, by a neglect of this duty, you are not likewiſe making yourſelf as chargeable as you can be with the guilt of many other prayerleſs families. And as to yourſelf and your own family, I am perſuaded that both you and they muſt ſuffer much, in the important concerns of the ſoul and another world, by the neglect of the great duty of family-prayer. You hereby deprive them, and yourſelf, not only of a powerful motive to the other duties of religion, but of that which has proved in many inſtances a very great help in them: Of that which diſpoſes the mind both for the more publick and private exerciſes of devotion, for the ſteady honourable and delightful diſcharge of all the other duties of religion. But ſtill you ſay, "I cannot perform this duty as "I could wiſh, and as, I apprehend, "it ought to be performed: I almoſt "tremble when I think of engaging "in it, and cannot but fear that I "ſhould be ſadly embarraſſed and "confounded if I ſhould attempt it."

But

But whence have you theſe fears and apprehenſions concerning it? It is a miſtake to imagine that any very great talents are neceſſary for a comfortable and uſeful diſcharge of this duty. Witneſs the good ſucceſs with which many plain, ſerious chriſtians, of very low capacities and education, are carrying it on from day to day with their houſholds. "To ſpeak naturally (ſays "Dr. Doddridge upon the ſubject) and "in the main properly, is enough. "The plaineſt language, in addreſſes "to the GOD of heaven, appears to "me preferable to laborious, pompous, "and artificial expreſſions; plain ſhort "ſentences, uttered juſt as they ariſe "in the mind, would be beſt under-"ſtood by thoſe that join with you." Theſe the fulneſs of a devout heart will dictate; and ſuch you may make uſe of without ſaying any thing that even perſons of the beſt ſenſe and learning could reaſonably deſpiſe. But families in general are not judges of accuracy of thought and expreſſion, nor would thoſe that are, if really wiſe,

expect

expect the appearances of great art and labour in family devotions. The beſt end to be anſwered by them is to affect the heart with a becoming ſenſe of our daily ſins, and wants, and mercies; the connection we have continually with GOD, and the obligations we are under to him. And if you are enabled to lead the devotions of your family in a manner that may, with a divine bleſſing, anſwer ſuch ends as theſe, great good is done and nothing ſhould diſcourage you from purſuing the duty if you have engaged in it already, or from entering upon it, if you have not. But if, after having made the attempt ſeriouſly, and that in repeated inſtances, and with due preparation, you ſhould find it impracticable to pray without the aſſiſtance of a form, it becomes you for your family's ſake to uſe one. Many good men make uſe of forms of prayer in their families with advantage; and ſuch forms are now publiſhed as moſt families may join in very conſcientiouſly

morn-

morning and evening (a). "I hope "(ſays Dr. Doddridge) I ſhall give no "offence to any good chriſtian by ſay-"ing; but on this occaſion I ſhould "offend my conſcience by not ſaying, "that I have long thought an irrecon-"cilable averſion to forms of prayer, "even of human compoſition, as vain "a ſuperſtition as a paſſionate attach-"ment to them: and if any one had "rather that a family ſhould be pray-"erleſs than that a well choſen form "ſhould be gravely and devoutly read "in it, I think he judges as abſurd-"ly as if he ſhould rather ſee them "ſtarving to death than feed them out "of a veſſel whoſe materials or ſhape "are diſagreeable to him."

Though I muſt ſay again that I am perſuaded the difficulties and inconveniences of free prayer ſeem much greater to many at a diſtance than they would

(a) I may here refer you to the Family-Prayer-Book, printed for Waugh in Lombard Street, and that for Johnſton, and the Prayer at the end of Dr. Doddridge's Addreſs to the Maſter of a Family.

would do if they could be prevailed upon to make the attempt, and perſevere in it for a few days, or at moſt a few weeks in good earneſt. Do but fix your hours for family-prayer morning and evening, and reſolutely keep to them; think a little before hand of the duty you are about to engage in, and take ſome pains to cheriſh proper ſentiments and affections in your heart by the reading of a devotional part of the word of GOD; and I cannot think you would find yourſelf greatly at a loſs either for thoughts or expreſſions ſuited to your own circumſtances and thoſe of the family whoſe ſupplications and thankſgivings you are appointed to preſent unto GOD. But if you will ſuffer every trifle to interrupt the ſacred ſervice, or to employ both your hands and head, to the very laſt moment before you engage in your devotions, you are neceſſarily unfitting yourſelf for them, and making difficulties, which a prudent and pious care might either entirely prevent, or effectually remove. You would find the cultiva-

tion

tion of a ſerious ſpiritual temper, a pious affection towards GOD and the Redeemer, and a tender regard to the beſt intereſts of your domeſtics, on theſe occaſions, teaching your mouth and adding knowledge to your lips. Though if you ſhould be at ſome times embarraſſed (and I know not who always finds the ſame command of thought and expreſſion) that ought by no means to diſcourage you from a vigorous proſecution of this, any more than the other duties of devotion. True indeed it may give you ſome concern, but even that may do you good upon the whole; and if it makes you more humble both before GOD and man, more ſenſible of your dependance upon divine grace, more earneſt in your applications to GOD for the influences of his holy Spirit to help your infirmities, and more conſtant and diligent in cultivating both the gift and the grace of prayer, ſome very valuable ends are anſwered by the mortification itſelf.

But

But you ſeem to be apprehenſive that your prayers would not be acceptable to thoſe who are under your roof, tho' they were attended with leſs imperfection than they really are. Some in your family, much older than yourſelf, you imagine would think it an unbecoming forwardneſs in you to undertake theſe religious ſervices. But let me intreat you to conſider well of what great importance it is to every family, and indeed to the intereſt of Chriſt and of vital practical godlineſs, that this duty ſhould be performed conſcientiouſly in every houſhold. And if you have the care of the family in a great meaſure for the preſent world, and the concerns of the body, how can you think yourſelf excuſed from the care of their ſpiritual and eternal concerns? If any, now with you, have lived in families where it was neglected, ſurely the time paſt is more than ſufficient in which they have lived without prayer, and it is high time they ſhould be called upon immediately to ſeek GOD. If they have been uſed to the

duty, they will ſo much the more ſenſibly feel their loſs, if you give them no opportunities, day after day, of attending upon it now. And I do not doubt but inſtead of cenſuring an attempt of this ſort as a mark of vanity, or diſcovering the leaſt diſpoſition to aggravate or ridicule any little imperfections with which the ſervice may at times be attended, they would feel a daily and moſt ſenſible pleaſure in joining with you in your morning and evening ſacrifices of prayer and thankſgiving to their Father and your Father, their GOD and your GOD. But if any of your domeſtics ſhould diſcover ſuch a contempt of the Almighty and of his worſhip as either to neglect or deride the ſervice, it nevertheleſs becomes you to be ſtedfaſt in the diſcharge of your duty, and if you cannot convince them of their ſin and folly you ought to remove ſuch diſcouragements by diſmiſſing them (if they be ſervants) from your family, rather than ſuffer them to continue as ſtumbling-blocks in your way, and the conſtant occaſions of

of miſchief to your own ſoul and the ſouls of others that are committed to your care. Nor indeed could you reaſonably hope for any great advantages, in any reſpect, from thoſe who ſo apparently diſcover a diſpoſition to deſpiſe all authority both human and divine; and who, to uſe a well known expreſſion, "neither fear GOD nor regard "man." But never let my Philetus think, that the diſpoſitions of ſuch, or indeed that any thing elſe will excuſe him in the neglect of his duty; rather ſuſpect (as you juſtly may) the propriety and weight of every conſideration that would keep you at a diſtance from GOD.

Can you ſay, "My family ſees ſo "much amiſs in me every day as "makes me aſhamed and indeed al-"moſt afraid to pray before them." What do they ſee in you? If I could ſuppoſe they ſaw you daily running with others to all exceſſes of riot, guilty of acts of injuſtice and intemperance; or that they heard the lan-

guage of hell in your mouth, I ſhould ſay you might be aſhamed. But aſhamed of what? aſhamed of your wicked conduct — but not of your humble and penitent prayers — unleſs you ſtill go on in your evil ways. And that were inconſiſtent with the regard to GOD and religion, which you have hitherto profeſſed. Yet there may be many imperfections in your daily converſation, with which thoſe who ſee and hear you daily cannot but be acquainted. But which (if it will bear a queſtion) which are you to part with, your duty or your ſins? the only proper uſe you can make of the truth, is to take with you words and turn unto the Lord, and ſay unto him, Heal our backſlidings, receive us graciouſly and love us freely; ſo will we render to thee not only the praiſes of our lips but likewiſe the conſtant and chearful obedience of our lives: And to be ſo much the more watchful of your walk and tongue that you may not only avoid every

every thing that would contradict your prayers, but may adorn that and every part of your religious profession, in the whole of your deportment, both at home and abroad.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

On Faſting and Humiliation.

TO the ſtated exerciſes of devotion which I have already recommended, let me entreat you, my Philetus, occaſionally to add that of religious and devout Faſting. Humiliation and ſelf-abaſement ſhould make a part of your daily buſineſs at the throne of grace. But there are ſeaſons in which it will become you to engage therein with peculiar attention and ſolemnity. The church, within your memory, as well as in former ages, has had its days of humiliation, and I cannot but hope that there are thoſe now in Britain who thus mourn apart for their own ſins, and the iniquities of the land in which they dwell. It has been uſual, on theſe days,

days, to abſtain from the common refreſhments of animal nature, and it ſeems but decent and proper to do ſo, as far as may be conſiſtent with that health and ſtrength which are neceſſary for performing the ſervice appointed. Our Saviour's faſt of forty days is not to be imitated as it was truly miraculous. Yet many chriſtians, in the firſt ages of the church, faſted once, and ſome twice a week; they then generally abſtained from their uſual meals till after evening prayer, in which they engaged about three o'clock; and ſome of them thought it wrong to eat any thing till after midnight. But our divine lawgiver has ſaid nothing either as to the time or degree of that abſtinence which is to be practiſed upon theſe occaſions, and he has manifeſted both his wiſdom and his goodneſs in declining it. Indeed it may be ſaid that he has never expreſsly enjoined faſting at all. But as his diſciples were uſed to faſt, he had little occaſion to order them to do ſo; and when he ſpake of the practice he was far from

ſay-

ſaying any thing to diſcourage it, but only blames the Phariſees for their oſtentation in theſe ſervices, and directs his followers not to appear unto men to faſt, but to make it their principal concern to approve themſelves therein to their heavenly Father. As you wiſh, that your faſt-days (whenever you engage in them, either in private or publick, on your country's account or your own) ſhould be acceptable days to the Lord, pay more attention to the ſpirit and manner in which you engage in the ſacred tranſactions thereof, than to the length of time you ſpend, or the degrees of abſtinence you obſerve in them.

When the Iſraelites were convinced of their guilt in following after idols, and ſaw themſelves in danger from the Philiſtines, "they faſted and ſaid unto Jehovah their GOD, we have "ſinned againſt the Lord." The king and inhabitants of Nineveh, though heathens, were ſenſible of the propriety of this cuſtom, and adopted it with ſucceſs, when threatened with deſtruc-

deſtruction by the prophet Jonah. Holy Daniel thus humbled himſelf before GOD on account of the deſolations of Jeruſalem. He prayed and made his confeſſion, with faſting, and ſackcloth and aſhes. That faithful ſervant of GOD Nehemiah, when he heard of the diſtreſſes of his brethren and of the holy city, ſat down and mourned certain days, and faſted, and prayed before the GOD of heaven.

The devout Pſalmiſt of Iſrael expreſſed his concern in the ſame manner on the death of his child and the afflictions even of his enemies—" as " for me, when they were ſick, my " clothing was ſackcloth, I humbled " my ſoul with faſting." Nor were exerciſes of this ſort confined to ſeaſons of diſtreſs and danger. St. Luke tells us of the pious propheteſs Anna, that when ſhe was fourſcore and four years old, ſhe departed not from the temple, but ſerved GOD with faſtings and prayers night and day. Cornelius mentions his having faſted four days and prayed in his houſe.

And

And this made part of the ſolemnity with which the firſt chriſtian miniſters were ſeparated to their paſtoral office. "The Holy Ghoſt ſaid, ſeparate me Barnabas and Saul for the "work whereunto I have called them; "and when they had faſted and prayed and laid their hands on them they "ſent them away." And again, it is ſaid of Paul and Barnabas that "when "they had ordained them elders in "every church, and had prayed with "faſting they commended them to "the Lord on whom they believed." Good men there have likewiſe been, even in theſe ages of levity and licentiouſneſs, who have thus obſerved the weekly or annual return of thoſe days in which they have either been betrayed into ſin, or viſited with great troubles; as others have likewiſe religiouſly kept thoſe on which they have entered upon ſtations or employments of peculiar moment and difficulty. But faſting has not uſually been practiſed except on very ſolemn and important occaſions. It was originally

deſign-

ed to expreſs and promote humbleneſs of mind, a contrite ſenſe of ſin, our conſtant dependance upon GOD for every enjoyment, and our unworthineſs of the leaſt of his mercies. Hence his people were required, on theſe days of humiliation, to refrain from all pleaſures, and to lay aſide their uſual buſineſs; to make reſtitution to the injured, and to deal out their bread to the hungry: they were then to acknowledge and renounce their former ſins, to implore his forgiveneſs and future favour, and to renew their covenant engagements with him and for him.—To enable you therefore to engage in the proper ſervices of a faſt-day in a manner acceptable in the ſight of GOD, and profitable to your own ſoul, you muſt attend diligently to the conduct of providence in the ſeveral events that ariſe within your obſervation, both in private and publick. It will be neceſſary for you to look often and ſeriouſly into the ſtate of religion in your own ſoul, in your family, in the nation in general, and in the church

of GOD. It will be your wiſdom to make and preſerve memorials of theſe things, and to review them with great care and ſerioufneſs at the approach of theſe ſeaſons. Indeed you cannot be prepared or diſpoſed to enter upon the ſolemn buſineſs of your faſt-days unleſs you maintain an habitual acquaintance with your own hearts, are ſenſible of your deficiencies, and the ſins that moſt eaſily beſet you; and are attentive to thoſe that prevail around you both in the world, and in the church of GOD. Unleſs you cheriſh a lively perſuaſion of the reality and equity of a providence, and feel a powerful conviction of the importance of the divine favour as that to which nations, and churches, and ſouls owe all their happineſs and their hopes. Nothing ſhort of this will enable you to enter into your acknowledgments of ſin with due ſhame and contrition of heart. Without this you will never pour out your ſoul before GOD with a becoming freedom and fervour, either when you are called to deprecate impending evils,

to

to implore the forgiveneſs of abounding iniquities, or to intreat the removal of judgments with which you or your country are already viſited. And you know that his command to his people, upon theſe occaſions, is "rent "your heart and not your garments, "and turn unto the Lord your God." Nor will you I hope, my Philetus, forget that wiſe and ſalutary caution of Jeſus to his diſciples, "When ye faſt "be not as the hypocrites, of a ſad "countenance; for they diſfigure their "faces that they may appear unto "men to faſt, verily I ſay unto you "they have their reward. But thou, "when thou faſteſt, anoint thine head, "and waſh thy face, that thou appear "not unto men to faſt, but unto thy "Father, who is in ſecret; and thy "Father which ſeeth in ſecret ſhall "reward thee openly." Alas, how eaſily does the pride of our hearts deceive us! how often and yet how imperceptably does it inſinuate itſelf even into our moſt ſolemn moments! Ever remember, Philetus, that you have

herein to do with a GOD that ſearches the heart; and that you will need the merit and interceſſion of Jeſus to procure you acceptance in theſe and in all your ſervices. And let me likewiſe remind you of the importance of maintaining a converſation and walk through life agreeable to the ſacred and ſolemn tranſactions of ſuch days as theſe. Very awful and alarming things are ſaid, in the word of GOD, of ſuch as are deſtitute of the power of Godlineſs while they retain the form of it. And it is obſervable that ſuch hypocrites in GOD's Sion are particularly upbraided with their abominations, as groſsly inconſiſtent with the engagements of their faſt-days: See the lviiith chapter of the prophecies of Iſaiah. Indeed he laid a reſtraint upon the lips of his ſervant Jeremiah that he ſhould not intercede for them then. "Pray "not thou for this people, neither lift "up cry nor prayer for them, neither "make interceſſion for them, for I "will not hear thee." And if the bleſſed GOD would not hear him on their

their behalf they had very little encouragement to hope for acceptance themſelves, when they were guilty of the moſt heinous crimes, and at the ſame time that they came and ſtood before him in his houſe, and ſaid "We are "delivered to do all theſe abomina-"tions." He ſaid expreſsly concerning them, while in this ſtate and character, "When they faſt I will not "hear their cry." Neither abſtinence from meat and drink, nor any other external mortifications whatſoever practiſed by thoſe whoſe hearts and lives are unholy will avail with an all-ſeeing, and perfectly pure and righteous GOD. The ſacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. May yours, as ſuch, at theſe and at all ſeaſons meet with acceptance!

But give me leave my Philetus to remind you that it is the will of GOD concerning his people that they ſhould, in every thing, give thanks. You will have many reaſons to mingle devout thankſgivings with your prayers in the

moſt humbling and diſtreſſing circumſtances and ſeaſons, on your faſt-days themſelves.

If you have your days of ſickneſs and ſorrow you have many more of caſe and comfort: If you have loſt ſome of your friends and enjoyments you have others given or continued. If you have ſome to diſtreſs and terrify you, you have others to comfort and encourage you. Mercies in your perſon and in your family; natural and ſpiritual bleſſings, and thoſe ſo many and ſo great as make it your indiſpenſible duty to abound in thankſgiving. But eſpecially thoſe interpoſitions of divine providence and grace in which the Almighty has, as it were, gone out of his place either for your own preſervation and happineſs, or thoſe in which he has ſhewn himſelf the churches ever faithful friend and protector. The chriſtian ſabbath is a weekly thankſgiving-day on which the whole church is called upon to celebrate the triumphs of the Redeemer's reſurrection from the dead. And the lively hope to which

which we are thereby raiſed, together with the privileges which the church at preſent enjoys under the guardianſhip and government of its riſen and glorified head, will well engage us to enter his gates, on that day, with thankſgiving and his courts with praiſe. Nor ought we, by any means, to forget or overlook what GOD has been doing, in ſucceeding ages, to ſecure theſe privileges to us. Deliverances like thoſe which Britain and the Proteſtant intereſt received on the fifth of November were too important to both to be loſt in forgetfulneſs by the true friends of either. And I am perſuaded when you look back upon the conduct of providence towards yourſelf and your family, you muſt ſee occaſions to remark and acknowledge the divine goodneſs in a great variety of inſtances. Here and there might you, and, give me leave to ſay, you ought to have ſtopped to erect an Ebenezer, and ſing of the loving kindneſs of the Lord. Has he protected you or yours in perilous circumſtances? has he given

you counſel in difficulty, and ſtrength in weakneſs? has he adminiſtred divine conſolations in ſeaſons of uncommon diſtreſs, and brought you back again from the gates of the grave? above all has he called you out of darkneſs into his marvellous light, and begotten you again to a lively and good hope, through the riches of his grace in Chriſt Jeſus, for eternal glory?—Surely you muſt think it your duty not only to mingle devout praiſes with your daily prayers, but likewiſe to ſet apart ſome ſeaſons more immediately for the exerciſes of thankſgiving. Then celebrate his mercies in pſalms and hymns and ſpiritual ſongs, making melody in your heart and with your voice unto the Lord.—Nature itſelf teaches thoſe who are untaught by divine revelation this grateful acknowledgment of divine favours. Nay the brute creation expreſs a ſenſe of them in their way. It is highly becoming in a creature, and eſpecially a ſinful creature. Good men are frequently thus employed, and whoſo offereth praiſe, it is ſaid,

glori-

glorifieth GOD. Herein you are beginning the work of heaven, and will, by ſuch employments as theſe, be forming for that ſociety of holy and happy ſpirits who are ſinging the praiſes of him that ſits on the throne, and the Lamb for ever. Adieu!

I am, &c.

LET-

LETTER XVII.

On the reaſonableneſs and expediency of a devout life in general.

I Am apprehenſive, my Philetus, you will meet with many things to unfit and indiſpoſe you for the exerciſes of devotion. Some will tell you they are needleſs, and others will repreſent them as quite unreaſonable. "Devo-" tion," ſays one, "is only the buſi-" neſs of monks and hermits;" "none "give themſelves up to it," ſays another, "but the mad or the melancho-" ly." Some will endeavour to perſuade you that religion conſiſts merely in a charitable temper and behaviour to your fellow creatures; and others, that it is time enough to be devout in old

old age. Buſineſs or pleaſures will ſometimes beſpeak your attention at the hour of prayer; and it is well if you do not often find a ſad propenſity to liſten to theſe inſinuations, through an evil heart of unbelief that is prone to depart from the living GOD. But does it not appear to you, in your ſerious and thoughtful moments, highly reaſonable that a creature ſhould thus call upon his GOD? Surely the moſt high, the creator and governor of heaven and earth is worthy of all the honour and homage that we or any of his creatures are capable of rendering to him. We are the workmanſhip of his hand and the ſheep of his paſture; daily and hourly dependant upon his care and bounty, and under innumerable obligations to him. Every power of our natures, and every enjoyment of our lives is from him. And ſhall we not daily bow the knee in humble adoration before that GOD in whom we live and move and have our being? Can we be inſenſible to the hand that guards, and feeds, and clothes

us continually? or while we know that we are indebted to him for every present enjoyment, and for our hopes of a better world, can we neglect to praise him and to serve him?

His creatures in all their various forms, from the higheſt ſeraph to the meaneſt reptile, own their dependance, and ſpeak forth his praiſes; and ſhall man alone deny him this reaſonable tribute? Man whom he has diſtinguiſhed from among all his creatures upon earth by the tokens of his ſpecial favour? Man that has forfeited his all by ſin, and who is continually provoking the moſt High by his abominations? ſhall he neglect to aſk the forgiveneſs and favour of that GOD whoſe favour is life, and whoſe frown muſt make him miſerable for ever? Gratitude and intereſt forbid it! We owe him this honour and homage as the children of his family, and the ſubjects of his moral government; and ſtill more as the redeemed of his Son Chriſt Jeſus, and heirs, through grace, to a kingdom in the heavens.

And

And give me leave to remind you that this religious ſervice is no more than he hath expreſsly required of us. Draw nigh to GOD—exerciſe thyſelf unto godlineſs—be inſtant in prayer—watch unto prayer, and continue in the ſame with thankſgiving—yield yourſelves unto GOD—preſent your bodies unto the Lord a living ſacrifice. Nay, his word gives us many alarming intimations of the guilt and danger of living without GOD in the world; as well as ſpeaks in the moſt reſpectful terms of ſuch as have walked with him, and lived as ſeeing him who is inviſible. Let the divine authority, my Philetus, be ſacred with you. Weigh well the dignity and grace that are beautifully intermixed in that declaration of your divine Lord, "Ye are my friends if "ye do whatſoever I command you;" and compare with it that awful truth of his holy Apoſtle James, "Whoſo-"ever ſhall ſo nearly keep the whole "law as to offend knowingly and wil-"fully though it be only in one point "he is guilty of all;" ſo far is he from

from approving himself a faithful servant of Jesus.

Take no pains to evade the force of such plain truths of the word of GOD now; the time will come when you cannot. Say unto GOD, both in your words and in your actions, "Whatsoever thou, my supreme Lord and lawgiver, hast commanded that will I do and be obedient." You must acknowledge it the part of true wisdom to walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous: and such, in all ages, have manifested a conscientious regard to the duties of devotion. Enoch and Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Hannah and Elisha, Isaiah, Jonah, Daniel and the rest of the patriarchs and prophets under the former dispensation retired frequently for communion with GOD. And our divine master has herein set us an example that we should follow his steps. Converse with his heavenly father was his daily delight, and when he could not enjoy it with advantage in any apartment of the house

houſe where he was he retired into the fields to pour out his ſoul before GOD, and, in one inſtance at leaſt, continued all night in that ſacred exerciſe. Nor would he ſuffer either the pleaſures of converſe with men, or even the important ſervices of his publick miniſtry to deprive him of intercourſe with his Father in ſecret. He had meat to eat there which the world knew not of. And his genuine diſciples, in all ages, have found a pleaſure and advantage in ſuch a devout retirement ſufficient to recommend it to them. Hypocrites perform all their acts of devotion as well as of charity in publick to be ſeen of men; but the upright in heart ſeek firſt to be approved of GOD and admitted near him; and with good reaſon. The ſoul ſeldom ſees itſelf, its GOD, or another world in ſo juſt and ſtriking a light as when it is ſhut up from every other object; it may certainly be moſt free and full in its petitions and acknowledgments there;

and by theſe ſecret exerciſes of devotion it is both diſpoſed and prepared for a more conſtant and profitable diſcharge of every other duty; eſpecially "do they (as one expreſſes it) trim "the lamp for the family and the "houſe of GOD, and make it burn "in both with a brighter and a ſtronger "flame." And thoſe that fear the Lord have always delighted in the religious duties of both. "How amiable (ſays David) are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hoſts! My ſoul "longeth, yea even fainteth for the "courts of the Lord, my heart and "my fleſh crieth out for the living "GOD. Bleſſed are they that dwell "in thine houſe; for a day in thy "courts is better than a thouſand. I "was glad when they ſaid unto me, "let us go into the houſe of the "Lord."

And think, my Philetus, of the great encouragement you have to hope for acceptance in theſe ſacred ſervices. What pleaſing repreſentations does his word

word give us of the condeſcention and goodneſs, faithfulneſs and grace of the object of our religious worſhip! In how many inſtances has he both promiſed and manifeſted his peculiar favour to thoſe who thus wait upon him! How much is there eſpecially in the merciful appointment of Jeſus to the office of a mediator, to encourage you to come boldly to the throne of grace, to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Through him he has given exceeding rich and precious promiſes to them that ſeek him. He has aſſured us that he will regard the cry of the deſtitute, and will not deſpiſe their prayer; nay his ear is open to the voice of their ſupplications; and it is repeatedly ſpoken of as his delight. Seek, ſays his Son Jeſus, and ye ſhall find, aſk and ye ſhall receive, knock and it ſhall be opened unto you. And in numberleſs inſtances has the declaration of his apoſtle James been verified, that the inwrought fervent

prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Embrace the privilege, my Philetus, while it is continued; ſeek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. It is yet the accepted time, it is yet the day of ſalvation. Draw nigh to GOD and he will draw nigh to you; and ſo make it good for you to draw nigh to him. A moſt delightful employment! Solomon ſays of all wiſdom's ways, that they are ways of pleaſantneſs; but he, and his pious father before him, found peculiar pleaſure in thoſe paths in which they walked moſt devoutly with GOD. A vain world may indeed account the exerciſe of the divine life enthuſiaſtic madneſs, and a converſation according to godlineſs a melancholy gloom (the natural man receiveth not the things of GOD) but experience teaches the ſpiritual and heavenly minded chriſtian, that it adminiſters a ſolid and ſublime joy; a joy ſuited to his intelligent nature, and his hopes for immortality. Did you ever,

ever, my Philetus, hear of any one who had been much in holy intercourſe with GOD, that repented of the piety of his youth, or the more aſſiduous ſervices of his riper years? Was ever any one aſhamed of the tears he ſhed at the throne of grace on a review of miſimproved privileges and broken vows, or over the ſad remainders of corrupt nature within him? Did ever any of GOD's faithful ſervants grudge the pains they have taken, or the hours they have employed in watching and praying that they might not enter into temptation? Can any one of that character think the time loſt that he has ſpent with GOD in a devout retirement from the world's ſnares and hurries? Can he wiſh he had been leſs frequent in divine ordinances, or think much of the expence or trouble he may have been at for them? Can he regret it that he has laid himſelf under the ſtricteſt obligations to be the Lord's in ſecret, and in communion with his

people at his table? No, he has found a pleaſure in theſe ſacred tranſactions that makes the recollection of them ſatisfactory, and their return truly deſirable. Therein he has been admitted to the moſt amiable and endearing views, by faith, of his GOD and his Redeemer: There he has ſeen, in the moſt convincing and affecting light, the vanity of all created good; and his ſoul has rejoiced in the believing expectation of its compleat and everlaſting portion, with joy unſpeakable and full of glory. Who can deſcribe the holy triumphs of his ſoul in a humble and grateful ſurvey before GOD of all that goodneſs which he has laid up for him, and which he has wrought already on his behalf before the ſons of men? Who elſe knows the pious pleaſure with which it opens itſelf before him, and vows unreſerved obedience to his commands and ſubmiſſion to every diſpoſal of his providence? the holy triumph with which it there looks into the evidences of

of its title to glory; and realizes the company, entertainments and ſervices in which it hopes to ſpend its eternity?

And this is an employment that has its ſolid and laſting advantages, as well as its preſent pleaſures. When attended to wiſely it will be far from any injury to your temporal intereſt. Godlineſs, we are told, has the promiſe of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. But the advantages I chiefly refer to, and which I hope you are principally concerned to obtain, are of a ſpiritual nature; thoſe which you may hope to derive from thence to the ſoul both here and hereafter. I have obſerved to you before that the exerciſes of devotion are not merely or chiefly valuable for their own ſakes; nor are they to be reſted in as the end, but practiſed as the means of religion, and as what God has appointed to promote that great end, a meetneſs for the inheritance of the ſaints in light. Keep that end in view, and be ſtedfaſt, immoveable, always

ways abounding in this important part of the work of the Lord. You will find the happy influence of it to cherish the divine life in all the several springs and actings of it in the soul. The recollection of these sacred seasons, and the solemn transactions in which you have been therein engaged before GOD and man, will furnish you with a suitable reply to every temptation, "How can I do this wickedness and sin against GOD."

Nay you may hope from thence to derive strength and grace to enable you to withstand in an evil day, and having done all to stand. One hour employed in holy and devout intercourse with GOD, through Christ Jesus, and in the lively exercise of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, will do much to enable you to overcome the world. You will find these sacred exercises have, under GOD, a mighty efficacy to bear you up, under the pressure of every burden. None

but

but thoſe who experience it can tell what a relief and conſolation it affords to unboſom the heart to ſuch a friend as the bleſſed GOD in ſeaſons of affliction and trouble. Nor can any but ſuch as have thus caſt their care upon him know with what tenderneſs and ſucceſs he cares for them. But ſuch have, in repeated inſtances, teſtified for GOD in this reſpect. "This poor "man (ſaid one of himſelf, laying his hand upon his breaſt) "cried and "the Lord heard him, and ſaved him "out of all his troubles." O taſte and ſee, my Philetus, that the Lord is gracious; bleſſed is the man that truſteth in him—they that ſeek the Lord ſhall not want any good thing—the righteous cry and the Lord heareth, and delivereth him out of all his troubles. This he often does literally; or if the trial be continued he ſupports under it and overrules it for good; makes it productive of the peaceable fruits of righteouſneſs here,

or

or a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory hereafter.

And do but follow the chriſtian who has ſpent his days thus with GOD upon earth to the borders of eternity, there you will probably ſee much to convince you that it is good indeed to draw near, and to live near to GOD: he hath hope in his death: and what he has known of the pleaſures of intercourſe with his heavenly Father makes him willing to leave the world, and be abſent from the body, that he may be forever with him. What he has already known of the authority and grace of GOD in Chriſt Jeſus, and the proſpects opening upon him, take off the horror and dread of the dark valley through which he is about to paſs to his Lord's preſence. The ſting of death is taken away, and he is willing and deſirous rather to depart and be with Chriſt, which is far better. He knows in whom he has believed, and can rely on the mighty power, the invariable faithfulneſs and grace

grace of his GOD and his Redeemer to keep what he has committed to him againſt that day. He has learned ſomewhat of the ſpirit and begun the buſineſs of heaven, and he longs to be there, that he may purſue it with angels and glorified ſaints without interruption and without end.—You ſay now, "let me die the death of the "righteous," and moſt heartily do I wiſh that you may,—but then you muſt live, as he does, a life of faith in GOD, and of love and duty to him, and his Son Jeſus. A dying hour will ſtrip the ungodly, the ſelf deceiver, and the hypocrite of every falſe hope. His carnal confidence, and his carnal enjoyments will fail him then; and it is no wonder if they prove as thorns in his dying bed to render his laſt moments reſtleſs to himſelf and diſtreſſing to all about him. But mark the man of true piety, and behold him whoſe heart has been right with GOD, for the end of that man is peace. And could you follow him through the vale

of

of death into the regions of immortality, you would ſee in him there an eternal recommendation of the path in which he has walked with GOD to that better country. He finds the pleaſure and benefit of his paſt ſeaſons of devout intercourſe with GOD there.

Be it your conſtant concern, my Philetus, your moſt important buſineſs upon earth by this means to get ready for heaven—to be thereby forming to a reliſh of heaven's divine employment, and to a capacity for it. In theſe ſacred exerciſes of devotion you may hope to learn much of that humility; that ſacred deteſtation of every evil word and work; that purity of manners and of heart; that comprehenſive affection for the whole family of GOD on earth and in heaven; that ſupreme love to him that ſits upon the throne and the lamb; that high delight in his preſence and ſervice; and that ardent zeal for the honour and glory of the Moſt High which conſtitute the character and happineſs of angels and the

the ſpirits of the juſt made perfect, of whom it is ſaid (by a diſtinguiſhed ſervant of Chriſt, who was admitted to a viſion of their appearance and employments) they "ſtand, clothed in white "robes, before the throne of GOD, "and ſerve him day and night in his "temple."

I am, &c.

THE END.

Sold by J. Buckland in Paternoſter-Row.

MUSEUM BRITANNICUM

I. A New and Complete Syſtem of ARITHMETICK, Vulgar and Decimal. Together with the Principles of Menſuration, both of Superfices and Solids. To which is added, A ſhort Appendix on Land-Surveying, And a Liſt of Foreign Coins, with an Account of the Value of each in English Currency.

For the Uſe of Schools.

Price neatly bound Six Shillings.

II. The Rudiments of the Greek Tongue, Collected and Explained nearly on the Plan of Mr. Ruddiman's Rudiments of the Latin.

Price bound Two Shillings.

III. A Diſſertation on the Religious Knowledge of the Ancient Jews and Patriarchs: Containing, An Inquiry into the Evidences of their Belief and Expectation of a Future State.

To which is annexed,

Some Account of a Greek Concordance to the New Teſtament, with a Specimen of the Work, now preparing for the Preſs with

with as much Expedition as the Nature of the Work and the Author's other Engagements will permit.

☞ The above are publiſhed by the Rev. Mr. Addington.

IV. The FRIENDLY INSTRUCTOR, or a Companion for Young Ladies and Young Gentlemen, in which their Duty to God and their Parents, their Carriage to Superiors and Inferiors, and ſeveral other very uſeful and inſtructive Leſſons are recommended, in plain and familiar Dialogues.

(Adorned with Cutts)

With a Recommendatory Preface by P. Doddridge, D. D.

The Fifth Edition, in two Volumes, neatly bound in Red price 1 s. 6 d.

V. The Nature and Cauſes of Irreſolution in Religion, and the Reaſonableneſs of a thorough Determination repreſented in three Sermons on Acts xxvi. 28, 29. the Subſtance of which was preached at Northampton, May 16, 1742.

By Samuel Clarke, D. D.

The ſecond Edition, Price bound 1 s.

VI. The

Books Sold by J. Buckland.

VI. The Reformed Pastor, a Discourse on the Pastoral Office. Designed principally to explain and recommend the Duty of personal Instruction and Catechising. To which is added, An Appendix, containing some Hints of Advice to Students for the Ministry, and to Tutors.

Written by the Reverend and Pious

Mr. Richard Baxter.

Abridged, and reduced to a new Method

By Samuel Palmer.

The late learned and worthy Dr. Doddridge recommends the Reformed Pastor in the following Words. "It is a most "extraordinary Performance, and should "be read by every young Minister before "he takes a People under his stated Care; "and I think the practical Part of it should "be reviewed every two or three Years: "For nothing has a greater tendency to "awaken a Minister to that Zeal in his "Work, for want of which many good "Men are but shadows of what, by the "Blessing of God, they might be, if the "Maxims and Measures laid down in that "incomparable Treatise were strenuously "pursued." Price 2 s Stitch'd.

VII. Meditations upon various Subjects, Religious and Moral, in a Train of Visions, chiefly designed for Persons in younger Life. Price bound 1 s 6 d.